WRITINGS

by Hamilton Smith

A compilation of 92 essays and meditations by Hamilton Smith on various spiritual topics including abiding in Christ, character studies, biblical themes, and practical Christian living from a Scripture-centered perspective.

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"Abide in me"

Hamilton Smith. On that touching occasion when the Lord was alone with His disciples, communicating His farewell words of comfort, and imparting to them His last instructions, again and again He presses the deep necessity, as well as the blessedness, of abiding in Him. We hear Him say,

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing . . . If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." (John 15: 47).

Again, the beloved Apostle, who heard these farewell words from the lips of the Lord, passes them on to believers in his Epistle. There we read:

"He that saith be abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked."

"And now, children, abide in Him; that, when He shall appear, we may have boldness, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming."

"Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not."

(1 John 2:6, 1 John 2:28; 1 John 3:6).

If, then, these verses set before us the blessedness of abiding in Christ, we may well pause to enquire, What are we to understand by the Lord’s words, "Abide in Me"? Do they not imply a walk in such nearness to Christ that the soul delights in all His loveliness and moral excellences, and thus finds in Him its object and perfect pattern?

Again, does not abiding in Christ suppose a heart in communion with Christ, that delights to confide in Him and learn of Him?

Above all does not abiding in Christ imply a life lived under the influence of His presence, realised by faith? If a saintly and Christlike man of God visited our home, would not his presence have a restraining influence upon everyone in the home? We should probably be a little more careful than usual of our words and ways. If this would be the effect of the presence of a man of like passions with ourselves, what would be the effect of the realised presence of Christ, Himself? At times sad scenes have taken place, even among the Lord’s people, in which we may have had our humbling part, when envy and strife prevailed, and believers have thoughtlessly, or even maliciously, wounded one another with bitter and offensive words. We may try to excuse our strong words. But should we not do well to ask ourselves, "What would have happened if the Lord had silently, but visibly, walked into our midst?" Should we not have to confess that under the influence of His presence many a bitter and offensive word would never have been uttered?

How good, then, it would be if we could ever remember that though the Lord is not visible to sight, yet He hears, He sees, He knows. Well indeed does the Psalmist ask, "He that planted the ear, shall He not hear? He that formed the eye, shall He not see? . . . He that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know?" (Psalms 94:9-10). To walk, then, in the consciousness that He listens to our words; that He sees our every act; that He reads our thoughts, is to walk under the blessed influence of His presence and thus abide in Him.

Furthermore, these Scriptures, that exhort us to abide in Christ, tell us also the blessedness we shall enjoy if we do abide in Him.

First, we learn that abiding in Christ we shall bring forth fruit. The importance of this is pressed upon us by being stated both negatively and positively. We are told that unless we abide in Christ we cannot bring forth fruit. Then we are told that if we abide in Christ, and He in us, we shall bring forth much fruit. From another Scripture we learn that the fruit of the Spirit is "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23). What are these lovely qualities but a description of the beautiful character of Christ? So we may surely say that the fruit of which the Lord speaks is the reproduction of His own character in the lives of believers. The fruit, in this passage, is not service or the exercise of gift, however important in its place. Of necessity gifts are confined to the few: but it is open to all, young and old alike, to express something of the loveliness of Christ in their lives. Any little setting forth of the graces of Christ goes up as fruit to the Father, and goes out as testimony to the world. This, then, is the great object for which we are left in this dark world, to shine as lights by exhibiting something of the beautiful character of Christ. This will only be possible as we abide in Christ. We shall never exhibit the character of Christ by simply trying to be like Christ. If, however, we seek His Company, and come under His influence, by abiding in Him, we shall be changed into His image from glory to glory.

Yet sure, if in Thy presence My soul still constant were, Mine eye would, more familiar Its brighter glories bear. And thus, thy deep perfections Much better should I know, And with adoring fervour In this Thy nature grow.

Secondly, the Lord’s words plainly tell us, that, abiding in Christ our prayers will have an answer. If under the blessed influence of His presence, with His words abiding in our hearts, our thoughts would be formed by His thoughts and our prayers would be in accord with his mind. Thus praying, we should have an answer to our prayers.

Thirdly, the Apostle John tells us, in his Epistle, that "abiding in Him" will lead to a "walk even as He walked" (1 John 2:6). How did Christ walk? Of Him we read, "Christ pleased not Himself." Speaking of the Father, the Lord Himself could say, "I do always those things that please Him". This is the perfect pattern for the believer’s walk for the Apostle Paul can say, we "ought to walk and please God" (1 Thessalonians 4:1). Again, the same Apostle exhorts believers to "walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us" (Ephesians 5:2).

Thus, may we not say, the outstanding marks of the Lord’s path were the entire absence of self-will in doing the Father’s will, and the serving of others in love. For us, it is only possible in any measure to tread such a path of perfection as we abide in Christ. How good, then, like Mary of old to sit at His feet and hear His words. Thus under His influence to recall His path, to trace His

footsteps, to listen to His words of love and grace, to see His hand stretched forth to bless, and, behind all His perfect walk and ways and words to discern the spirit of One who ever set aside all thoughts of self, in order to serve others in love.

We may know the doctrines of Christianity; we may rightly hold the great essential truths of our faith, but, as one has said, "no amount of knowledge however correct, no amount of intelligence, however exact, will ever put upon your soul the impress of the mind of the Lord Jesus Christ." If we are to wear the impress of Christ — if, as we pass along we are to have some sense of Him, we must be in His company, and walk with Him. Every man is formed by the company that he keeps: the character of the one in whose company we walk, is the character we shall reflect. We must abide in Christ and thus walk with Christ, if we are to be like Christ and walk as He walked.

Fourthly, the Apostle John further tells us that if abiding in Christ our walk will be such that we shall not be ashamed before Christ at His coming. Oftentimes there is much in our walk, and ways, and speech, and manners, that passes current with men, and even among the people of God, and of which we may judge very lightly when viewed by human standards. If, however, we were to judge ourselves, and our words, and ways, in the light of the coming glory of the appearing of Christ, should we not find much that we should have to condemn, and confess with shame, as far short of the standard of glory.

Only as we abide in Christ, under the influence of His presence, and so walk in self-judgment, shall we be preserved from all that which would cause shame in the day of glory.

Fifthly, we are reminded by the Apostle John, that "Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not" (1 John 3:6). From the preceding verses we learn what the Spirit of God means by sin, for we read, in v. 4, "sin is lawlessness". The essence of sin is doing one’s own will without reference to God or man. The world around is increasingly marked by lawlessness — everyone doing that which is right in his own eyes. The result being that, in spite of civilization, education, and legislation, the world system is breaking up, and society, and nations are increasingly disintegrating. Wherever the spirit of lawlessness prevails, disintegration will follow, whether it be in the world or among the people of God. As believers we are ever in danger of being affected by the spirit of the world around. Thus it has come to pass that through lack of watchfulness the same principle of lawlessness, that is breaking up the world system, has wrought division and scattering among the people of God.

If, in a school, each pupil was allowed to do his own will the school would inevitably break up. If each member of a family followed his own will the family would be wrecked; and if each individual of a company of believers pursues his own will, disruption must follow. The spirit of lawlessness, in whatever sphere it shows itself, will lead to disintegration, and the greater the sincerity of those who pursue their own will, the greater the harm they will cause. There is no greater cause of disruption among the people of God than the determined self-will of a sincere man.

How then are we to escape the evil principle of lawlessness, or self-will? Only by abiding in Christ; for the Apostle says, ’Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not." Only as we are held under the influence of the One who could say, "I come . . . not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me," shall we escape the self-will that is the very essence of sin.

These, then, are the blessed results, as brought before us in Scripture, of abiding in Christ. If answering to the Lord’s words by seeking to abide in Him, our lives would bear fruit by expressing

something of the lovely character of Christ. Our prayers, being according to his mind, would have an answer. Our path would show forth something of the beauty of His walk. Our ways would be consistent with the coming glory of Christ. Our walk would be preserved from the lawlessness of the flesh that has its origin in the devil, that is the root cause of the ruin of man and the sorrows of the world.

How good, then, to heed the Lord’s word, "Abide in Me . . . for without Me ye can do nothing." We may be gifted and have all knowledge, and zeal, we may have long experience, but it still remains true that without Christ we can do nothing. Gift, and knowledge, and zeal, are not power. All these things will not enable us to overcome the flesh, to refuse the world, or escape the snares of the devil. We may have all these things yet without Christ, we may stumble at the smallest trial and fall into the greatest evils.

If, then, "without Christ" we can do nothing, let us seek to abide in Him and not dare to go forward for one day, or take a single step, without Him.

Oh keep my soul, then Jesus, Abiding still with Thee, And if I wander, teach me Soon back to Thee to flee.

S. Abiding in Christ.

Abiding in Christ.

John 15:1-8. In John 14:1-31 the disciples of Christ are viewed in connection with the sovereign grace of God that opens to us the Father’s house, makes known to us the Fathers heart, presents Christ as the One Who is coming to receive us into that home of bliss, and tells us of the coming of the Holy Spirit to lead our hearts into our heavenly privileges. That chapter ends with the significant words, "Arise, let us go hence." Christ and His disciples pass from the privacy of the Upper Room into the outer world. At once the truth presented is in character with this change of scene. For, the disciples are now viewed as in this world in their responsibility to bear fruit for God, and to witness before men in a world from which Christ is absent. We cannot have privileges without responsibilities. If it is our privilege to have part with Christ in heaven: it is our responsibility to live for Christ on earth. To set forth this responsibility the Lord uses the figure of the vine and its branches. In a vine the fruit is not found in the root and stock, but in the branches; but the vine is the source of the life that enables the branches to bear fruit. The Lord can say of Himself, "I am the true vine" and of His disciples, "Ye are the branches." It is only as we abide in Him that we shall be able to carry out our responsibility to bear fruit for the Father and witness for Christ.

Different meanings may attach to the word fruit in different Scriptures. In this passage fruit is not, surely, preaching, or any form of service, nor the converts that may result from ministry, but rather the moral excellencies of Christ reproduced in the believer. This fruit, viewed in connection with the Spirit, and in contrast to the works of the flesh, is spoken of in Galatians 5:1-26, as "Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, goodness. Fidelity, meekness, self-control." These moral excellencies were exhibited in perfection in the life of Christ on earth. If in our inner lives we express some of the moral excellencies of Christ under the Father’s eye, we shall surely exhibit something of Christ before men, and in this measure answer to our responsibility to bear fruit before the Father and to be a witness before men (John 14:8 and John 14:27).

Again, let us remember, that it is what we are, not simply what we say, that is the witness before men. The apostle could say. "For me to live is Christ." It is the life that is the true and most impressive witness to Christ. At the birth of Christ the religious leaders in Jerusalem had a very correct knowledge of Scripture, and could direct the wise men from the East to Christ, but they had no heart for Christ, and never took the way themselves. Their words witnessed to Christ but not their lives. Alas! it is possible to become a mere finger post that for ever points the way but never takes the path.

What then is the secret of living in any little measure the life of Christ? Is it not summed up in the Lord’s own words, repeated four times in this passage, "Abide in Me"? This being so, we may ask, What is implied in these words? Do they not suggest a life lived in attachment of heart to Christ; in dependence upon Christ, and in communion with Christ? Is not the first thought implied in the Lord’s words of verse four, "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me"? Obviously there can be no

fruit in a branch unless it remains attached to the vine. In like manner, unless the believer individually retains attachment of heart to Christ he will not exhibit the excellencies of Christ before God. "We love Him, because He first loved us:" how good then to seek to realise and enjoy His love that our hearts may cling to Him in love, for the Lord's words imply that it is only in the measure in which we abide in Him that He will be seen in us. The second truth connected with abiding in Christ is set forth in the Lord's words, "He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing." If then we can do nothing without Christ, we are entirely dependent upon Christ. To abide in Christ, then, implies a life of constant dependence upon Christ, that confides in Him, as unable to do anything without Him. Forgetting the Lord's words we, in our self-confidence, may often attempt to meet the little difficulties of life without reference to Him, only to find that they become occasions for some exhibition of the flesh rather than calling forth the excellencies of Christ. The Lord's words imply that left to ourselves, the smallest difficulties, and the greatest trials, are alike too much for us to meet in our own strength. How good, then, to cultivate a life of continual dependence upon Christ, and thus, "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 2:1). So living we should realise the truth of the Lord's words to the apostle Paul, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). This would lead us in our little measure to enjoy the experience of the apostle, when he said, "I have strength for all things in Him that gives me power (Php 4:13 N. Tn.).

Thirdly, have we not the thought of communion with Christ implied by the Lord's words, when He says, "If ye abide in Me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto yon" (Verse 7)? If our thoughts are formed by His word, we shall surely think with Him according to His revealed mind. Does this not imply communion with Him which Mary enjoyed when we read of her that she "sat at Jesus' feet, and heard His word"? To abide in Him, then, supposes not only the practical surrender of our wills, and distrust of ourselves, but clinging to Him in love, depending upon Him in our weakness, and communion with Him in His thoughts as made known in His word.

Moreover, the very word "abiding" supposes continuance. Alas! too often we are content with an occasional taste of His love; with turning to Him in some great emergency; and with knowing a great deal more of Martha's activity, even in His service, than of Mary's communion at His feet.

Further, let us remember that to abide in Him is not a matter of attainment only possible for an aged and mature saint, nor is it something that is limited to gifted servants. It is the privilege of the youngest believer, for the outstanding exhortation given by a servant of the Lord to some young converts was that "with purpose of heart they would cleave to the Lord" (Acts 11:23). To "cleave to the Lord" is surely to abide in Christ.

Furthermore, let us remember that to abide in Christ is wholly individual, and a privilege that remains in a day of ruin. The apostle John having reminded us that we are living in the "last hour," when there are many anti-christs, instructs us how to escape those who would lead us astray by exhorting us to "abide in Him" (1 John 2:18; 1 John 2:26; 1 John 2:28). The distinctive name of Anti-christ is "the lawless one" (2 Thessalonians 2:8 N.Tn.). The outstanding mark of the present age is lawlessness. One has truly described lawlessness as: "a want of respect for everything that is above self. A determination to have one's own way. . . . It is what will characterise the whole of

Christendom. Now it works in individuals, and it works largely in whole companies, but it will become the reigning spirit." The only safeguard against the intrusion of lawlessness into our individual lives, or into the companies of God's people, will he found in each one abiding in Christ. We might think that our safety lies in continuing in a particular company. There are, indeed, privileges to be enjoyed by two or three who meet together in the Name of the Lord, and we are exhorted not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. But no individual, in any company of saints, however scripturally gathered, will be safe unless abiding in Christ.

Further, let us remember, that to abide in Christ speaks of the inner life lived before God. The effect of the life will, indeed, be manifest before men as proving we are disciples of Christ: but attachment of heart to Christ, dependence upon Christ, and communion with Christ, all speak of the secret experiences of the soul. This is of the deepest importance for all the ruin of the church in responsibility, and the corruption of Christendom, can be traced back to departure from Christ in heart. The Lord's words to the church in Ephesus are, "Thou hast left thy first love." If we fail to abide in Christ, and thus cease to live the inner life before God, it will not be long before we cease to be a witness before men. The Lord has to say to the church that left first love to Himself, "I will come unto thee, and will remove thy candlestick out of His place." As the love grows less before Christ, the light grows dim before men.

Let us remember that this loss of heart attachment to Christ commenced among true Christians of whom the Lord has much to commend as far as the outward life was concerned. We are thus warned that it is possible to be active in christian works and yet lack the true secret motive for all service — love to Christ, or abiding in Christ. This outward life of service, without the inner life that clings in heart to Christ, leads at last to the self-complacency of Laodicea combined with indifference to Christ, and the greater the zealousness of the outward works without the inner life the greater will be the self-satisfaction. If the beginning of the church's fall is found in that saints did not continue to give Christ the first place in their hearts, the end will be a vast christian profession that will be spued out of Christ's mouth.

Christendom is only repeating the history of Judaism. When the Lord Jesus was here, the Jews were boasting in the law at the very time they were rejecting Christ, their promised Messiah. Today the civilised world boasts in Christianity while utterly indifferent to Christ. It sees the marvellous effects that have been produced in the world by the profession of Christianity, the mitigating of human misery, and the check that it is to the grosser evils of heathendom; and for the purposes of civilisation, and in the effort to make a better and brighter world it is prepared to make a profession of Christianity, to observe Christian ordinances and go through religious ceremonies, but it is indifferent to the Person and work of Christ. Even as Judaism ended in an outward religious profession while rejecting the Messiah, so Christendom ends in a profession of Christianity without Christ. To use the figure of the vine, the great mass make a profession of being branches but they are dead branches with no vital link with Christ the true vine. Such will be cast forth" as branches and come under judgment. In these last solemn moments of the church's history on earth, when the signs of the approaching apostacy of Christendom are clearly manifest, and lawlessness increases on every hand, is not the Lord recalling believers to Himself? His last words to the churches are addressed to the individual as He says. "Behold, I stand at the door and am knocking: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to Him, and will sup with him, and he with Me. Will not one that responds to the Lord's word, and opens the door of his heart

to Him, get back to first love, and enjoy communion with Christ, and thus answer to His words, Abide in Me, and I in you?

Such will not get back to any great public testimony that marked the Church in Pentecostal times, but he will get back to first love that marked the Church in the past; he will be lifted above the lawlessness that marks Christendom in the present; and he will look for the coming of Christ in the immediate future. In response to the Lord’s words. "Surely I come quickly," he will reply, "Amen, even so come Lord Jesus." May it then be our earnest desire to cleave with purpose of heart to the Lord: to walk in dependence upon Him, and in communion with Him, and thus answer to His own words, "abide in Me, and I in you."

H. Smith.

’Tis only in Thee hiding We feel ourselves secure:

Only in Thee abiding, The conflict can endure Thine arm the victory gaineth O’er every hateful foe:

Thy love our hearts sustaineth In all their cares and woe.

S. Abigail.

Abigail.

1 Samuel 25:1-44.

Hamilton Smith.

Edification Vol. 7, 1933, page 35.

Interwoven in the story of David’s chequered life, there are many fine characters, of whom, Jonathan, the three mighty men that drew water from the well, Mephibosheth, and Ittai, are bright examples. Among these friends of David, there is not one, perhaps, that wears a more beautiful character than Abigail, the Carmelitess. Very significantly her name means "source" or "cause of delight;" and surely her story proves that she was a source of delight to the heart of David. At the moment that she comes upon the scene, David, though the anointed of the Lord — the coming king, and the man of God’s heart — is seen as a hunted man, in the place of reproach, hiding in the caves of the earth; a needy wanderer in desert places; surrounded by a band of faithful followers, who had gathered themselves unto him (1 Samuel 22:1-2). In the course of his wanderings, he, and his followers, went about doing good; for the shepherds of one Nabal have to own that David and his men "were very good unto us." They protected the shepherds and their flocks night and day; so that, as long as David and his men were in their neighbourhood, they lost nothing. This Nabal, who had received such benefits from David and his men, comes before us as a man of substance and high social position. He was in the eyes of the world, a "very great" man — one who could entertain in royal style. (1 Samuel 25:2-3, 1 Samuel 25:36.) He was, however, in God’s sight, a churlish man and "evil in his doings;" one that would brook no interference from others (1 Samuel 25:3, 1 Samuel 25:17). He professes to have no knowledge of David; for he asks, "Who is David and who is the son of Jesse?" Doubtless he knew of David’s great victory over the giant, and how the women had sung his praises; but probably he looked upon David as one whose head has been turned by his great deeds, and the songs of women, and, aspiring to the throne had become a rebellious servant who had broken away from his master, king Saul. If any rumour of Samuel having anointed David to be the king, had reached his ears, he evidently treated it as a matter of complete indifference. He paid no heed to such reports; to Nabal, David was only a runaway servant.

Thus it comes to pass when David appeals to Nabal, in a day of plenty, to make some recompense for benefits received, that David’s young men are driven away with insults (1 Samuel 25:4-12). David, incensed by such treatment, prepares to take vengeance (1 Samuel 25:13). This brings Abigail to the front. She is described as a woman of a beautiful countenance, and, moreover, "of good understanding." She had evidently considered the people and events of her day, and the Lord had given her understanding according to that word of an Apostle, uttered so long after, "Consider what I say, and the Lord give thee understanding." She hears from one of the young men of her husband’s folly, and immediately acts in faith, and hence, without consulting her

husband. Nature could only see in David a runaway servant: faith, not looking at mere outward circumstances, sees, in the hunted and needy David, the coming king. Thus she takes her place as a subject of the king, and acts with the deference that is becoming in the presence of a king. She prepares her present and, having met David, she fell at his feet, bowed herself to the ground, and owned David as her lord. She takes sides with David against both her husband and king Saul. She owns that Nabal, though her husband, and a great man in the world, is acting in an impious and foolish way; and that Saul, though the reigning king, is but "a man" that is opposing God's anointed, She sees that David, though hunted and in poverty, is "bound up in the bundle of the living," and coming into a glorious inheritance.

Like Jonathan she had a high position in this world, as the wife of a "very great" man; in contrast to Jonathan she was not hindered, by her social position, from identifying herself with David in the day of his poverty and reproach. Very blessedly she looks beyond the day of David's suffering, and sees his coming glory. In view of that glory, and in confidence in the king, she can say, "When the Lord shall have dealt well with my lord, then remember thy handmaid;" words which cannot but recall that far greater scene, when a dying thief discerned, in a crucified Man, the Lord of glory, and the King of kings; and, looking beyond the awful circumstances of the moment to the coming glory, in confidence in the King, could say, "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into thy Kingdom." Thus the high-born Abigail and the low-born thief, with the same faith, look beyond the present, and act and speak in the light of the future; and the future justifies their faith.

David, though in wilderness circumstances, rightly acts with royal dignity, as a king with a subject. He dismisses Abigail with his blessing after having accepted her present, hearkened to her requests, and accepted her person (1 Samuel 25:32-35).

Returning to her husband, Abigail finds him debasing himself at a drunken feast. When sober he is informed of what has taken place, and at once "his heart died within him, and he became as a stone." About ten days after the Lord smote him, and, to use Abigail's figure, he is flung aside in judgment even as a stone is slung from the middle of a sling (1 Samuel 25:29, 1 Samuel 25:36-38).

Having obtained her freedom by death, Abigail becomes the wife of David. She leaves her high position, and the ease and comfort, that was naturally the lot of a woman of substance, to associate herself with David in his sufferings and wanderings. In this new path she will indeed know suffering and privation, even to being taken captive by David's enemies in the day of Ziklag; but she will also share his throne in the day of his reign at Hebron (1 Samuel 30:5; 2 Samuel 2:2). Have we not in this touching story, a foreshadowing of David's greater Son? Do we not see in the rejected and hunted David a picture of the One who was despised and rejected of men? Granted there is much in David that betrays the man of like passions with ourselves, yet, as a type how strikingly he sets forth the One who, in all His path of rejection, was absolutely perfect. David may, in a rash moment, gird on his sword to take vengance upon his enemies; Peter, in like spirit, will draw his sword to defend his Master; but, Christ, Himself, in the presence of His enemies, will say, "Put up again thy sword into his place." In every type there are these contrasts, only serving to show that no type can fully set forth the perfection of Jesus. Others may give us, at times, a very blessed foreshadowing of the coming One, but they are but shadows: Christ is the substance, and He alone is perfect.

If in David we can see a type of Christ, the King of kings, can we not see in Nabal a picture of the world’s attitude towards Christ, whether in the days of His flesh, or during His present session at the right hand of God? Nabal-like the thoughts of the world do not travel beyond the present time. As then, so now, it is a world bent upon present gain, feasting and pleasure. By such a world Christ is a despised and rejected Man; One in whom it sees no beauty; One whom it sets at nought; a world that has no sense of its need of Christ. It may indeed put on a Christian profession, yet, even so, it is so well satisfied with itself, that it can say, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing" — not even "need" of Christ. Thus though it puts on the name of Christ, it puts Christ, Himself, outside its doors. Yet, such is the long-suffering grace of Christ that, as David appealed to Nabal, even so He stands at the door of the professing Church, and knocks.

If, however, in the midst of this Christ-rejecting Christendom, there are any that hear His voice, and open the door to Christ, how rich will be their blessing. In the present such will know sweet communion with Christ in the day of His rejection, for the Lord can say to the one that opens the door to Him, "I will come into him, and will sup with him, and he with Me." In the future, the one that has supped with Christ in the day of His rejection, will reign with Him in the day of His glory, for the Lord can say, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me on my throne." Of all this was not Abigail a bright example? When the world of her day slammed the door in David’s face, she opened her door, and put her bounty at his disposal; and she had her bright reward. She enjoyed sweet communion with David, as his wife, in the day of his reproach; she sat with him on his throne, in the day of his glory.

Happy for us if we take warning by Nabal, and follow the example of Abigail. Happy indeed if we whole-heartedly separate from the corruptions of the Christian profession in order to gather to Christ in the outside place of His reproach. Christendom is putting forth vast efforts to bring about an unholy unity, in which every vital truth of Christianity will be denied, or lost in a mist of speculation, which Christ, Himself, will be outside; only to find, at last, that they have united to be spued out of Christ’s mouth. Well then for the true saints to be awakened to the solemnity of the day in which we live, and hear the voice of the Lord as He says, "Come out of her, My people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues." (Revelation 18:4).

Those that obey the words of the Lord will find, even as Abigail in her day, that the ties of nature, social position, and worldly religious authorities, will have to be overcome. If, however, like Abigail we are overcomers, we shall find the outside place with Christ one of deepest present blessing and highest future glory.

HAMILTON SMITH.

S. Abraham.

Abraham. by Hamilton Smith.

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Foreword

It would hardly be possible to overestimate the importance of a knowledge of God’s dealings with Abraham and his seed for a proper understanding of the Bible. To him the Lord said, "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). From Galatians 3:16 we learn that that seed was "Christ," and in Him alone are all the blessings of the covenant realized.

Abraham is also one of the most interesting characters of Bible history. There are few people mentioned so frequently in the Scriptures. Concordance pages show that besides the many, many places where his name appears in the Old Testament, he is mentioned more than seventy times in eleven books in the New Testament. He has the distinction of being called "The Friend of God" (James 2:23). To fit Abraham for the place God had purposed for him, the God of glory appeared to him (Acts 7:2) and gave him wondrous visions — visions of the Lord Jesus (John 8:56) and visions of a heavenly city "which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:10). The practical lessons we learn from his life are emphasized in Mr. Hamilton Smith’s book — Abraham, the Friend of God. We trust it may be blessed of the Lord as have been his former books, including those on Joseph, Elijah and Elisha. The Publishers February, 1957 The God of Abraham praise, Who reigns enthroned above;

Ancient of everlasting days And God of love:

Jehovah, great I AM, By earth and heaven confessed, I bow and bless the sacred Name, Forever blessed. The God of Abraham praise At whose supreme command From earth I rise to seek my joys At His right hand.

He calls me to forsake Earth’s wisdom, fame and power, And Him my only portion make, My shield and tower. The God of Abraham praise, Whose all-sufficient grace Shall guide me all my pilgrim days, In all my ways.

He calls a worm His friend, He calls Himself my God, And He shall save me to the end, Through Jesus’ blood.

He by Himself hath sworn, I on His oath depend, I shall, on eagle wings upborne, To heaven ascend:

I shall behold His face, I shall His power adore) And sing the wonders of His grace For evermore.

— T.Oliver. On the Other Side of the River

Genesis 27:1-30 To understand and profit by the history of Abraham it is necessary to realize the character of the world in which he lived, and from which he was called. The Background of His Life The Apostle Peter refers to the time before the flood as "the world that then was." The Apostle Paul speaks of "this present evil world" (Galatians 1:4); and finally, he speaks of "the world to come" — "the Millennial world" (Hebrews 2:5). There is, then, the world that then was, the world that now is, and the world to come. The world before the flood was ruined at the fall, and became utterly lawless. For sixteen hundred and fifty years God bore with the increasing wickedness of men, until the whole world having become corrupt before God and filled with violence, judgment fell and "the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished" (2 Peter 3:6).

After the flood the world that now is had its commencement. It was marked by entirely new elements. Government was introduced so that, in the mercy of God, wickedness should not go unpunished. Man was made responsible to curb evil by exercising judgment on the wicked. Noah was told, "whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed." But as man had failed in innocence and ruined the world before the flood, so man failed in government and ruined the present world. As ever, when man is set in responsibility, he fails, and that from the outset. Noah, who was set to govern, fails to govern himself. He gets drunk and is mocked by his son. In the main these things, alas, have ever marked the government of the world. Those put in authority fail to govern, and those in opposition mock at their failure. Moreover, we see that, as time passes, men misuse government to exalt themselves, and act in independence of God. They say, "Let us build us a city . . . and let us make us a name." Finally the world became apostate and fell into idolatry, for we read, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the river [Euphrates] in the old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, the father of Nahor: and they served other gods " (Joshua 24:2). As a restraint upon man’s evil, the world was separated into different families, with distinct nationalities, and divers tongues.

Such then, was the commencement, and such the character of the present evil world which is fast ripening for judgment. A world in which government is constituted by God, but ruined in the hands of men, who act independently of God, exalt themselves and finally apostatize from God, falling into idolatry. The Turning Point in His Life For over four hundred years God bore with this world and then the God of glory appears to a man on earth and commences to act on an entirely new principle — that of the sovereign call of God. It does not set aside the government of the world; it makes no suggestion as to improving or reforming the world, or correcting its evil. It leaves the world just as it is, but it asserts God’s paramount claim upon an individual, who is elected in sovereign grace, and called out of the world.

We cannot but realize the importance of this great truth, when we see from the New Testament that it is still the principle on which God is acting today. The Church is entirely composed of individuals that are called by grace. The Apostle Paul clearly states that God has not only "saved us" but also "called us"; and that this calling is "an holy calling . . . according to His own purpose" (2 Timothy 1:9). Again, in his epistle to the Romans we are reminded that believers are "the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). So in writing to the Hebrew believers, the Apostle appeals to them as "partakers of the heavenly calling" (Hebrews 3:1). The Apostle Peter tells us

we are "called . . . out of darkness into His marvellous light," and, he adds, "the God of all grace . . . hath called us unto His eternal glory" (1 Peter 2:9; 1 Peter 5:10).

It is clear then that believers are not only "saved" but "called." Naturally the first concern of an anxious soul is, like the jailer of old, "What must I do to be saved?" Having found salvation through faith in Christ and His finished work, we are too often content to rest in the knowledge that our sins are forgiven and that we are sheltered from judgment and saved from hell. We are slow to see that the same gospel that brings the good news of salvation from judgment proclaims the call of God to the glory of Christ. The Apostle can not only say to the Thessalonian believers that "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation," but immediately adds that "He called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14).

These different passages clearly show that if God calls us it is because He has a purpose in His heart which He desires to gratify. Moreover we learn that the "call" involves that we are called out of one world lying in darkness, or ignorance of God, to come into the marvellous light of all that God has purposed for Christ in another world. Further, if we are called to heaven, it is that we may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. The prize of the calling on high is to be with Christ and like Christ. Our Interest in His Life

These then are some of the blessed truths that are connected with the call of God and illustrated in the life of Abraham. The practical importance of the story of Abraham’s life lies in the fact that this great truth of the calling of God is brought before us, not by a doctrinal statement, but as exhibited in the life of a man of like passions with ourselves, and therefore in a way that the simplest can understand.

What powerful, mighty Voice, so near, Calls me from earth apart —

Reaches with tones so still, so clear, From th’unseen world my heart?

’Tis solemn: yet it draws with power And sweetness yet unknown:

It speaks the language of an hour When earth’s forever gone.

It soothes, yet solemnizes all!

What yet of nature is, Lies silent, though the heavenly call; No earthly voice like His.

’Tis He. Yes, yes; no other sound Could move my heart like this: The voice of Him that earlier bound Through grace this heart to His. In other accents now, ’tis true, Than once my spirit woke, Through life and peace, through which it grew Under His gracious yoke.

Blest Lord, Thou speak’st, ’twas erst Thy voice That led my heart to Thee — That drew me to that better choice Where grace has set me free!

Then wouldst Thou that I should rejoice, And walk by faith below —

Enough, that I had heard Thy voice, And learnt Thy love’s deep woe.

Thy glory, Lord — this living waste Thenceforth no rest can give: My path was one with earnest haste, Lord, in Thy rest to live.

Yes! then ’twas faith — Thy Word: but now Thyself my soul draw’st nigh — My soul with nearer thoughts to bow Of brighter worlds on high. And oh! how all that eye could see To others now belongs! The eternal home’s enough to me — My soul’s eternal songs. For Thou art near: Thou call’st me now In love I long have known, While waiting on Thy will below —

Till Thou my hopes shouldst crown. And Thou wouldst have me soon with Thee;

Thou, Lord, my portion art:

Thou hast revealed Thyself to me —

Thy nature to my heart! My happiness, O Lord, with Thee Is long laid up in store, For that bless’d day when Thee I’d see. And conflict all be o’er.

Yes! love divine in Thee I know; The Father’s glories soon Shall burst upon my ravished view —

Thyself my eternal crown!

Thou makest me brighter hopes to prove, Because nearer Thou art; With secrets of eternal love Thou fillest my longing heart.

How shall I leave Thee, Lord? This joy is from Thyself: it is My brightest hope without alloy, My pure, eternal bliss. With Thee, O Lord, I all things have, —

Unclouded joy divine In Thee, who first these "all things" gave Forever to be mine.

Yet I will wait, in labour still In Thy blest service here:

What Thou hast given me to fulfil Thy will — to me is dear!

I well can wait! Thou waitest yet, The word of that dread hour, Which shall Thy foes forever set As footstools of Thy power.

Yet, Lord! were once Thy will fulfilled, How better far with Thee, With Thee, my joy, my strength, my shield, In cloudless light to be?

O endless joy! how shall my heart Thy riches all unfold: Or tell the grace that gave me part, In bliss no tongue hath told?

Lord! Let me wait for Thee alone: My life be only this — To serve Thee here on earth, unknown;

Then share Thy heavenly bliss. The Call of God Genesis 11:31-32,Genesis 12:1-3 In the first portion of the life of Abraham there passes before us the path of faith that answers to the call of God; the hindrances to the path; the faith that takes the path; and the blessings in the path as well as the failure, temptations, and conflicts in the path. THE CHARACTER OF THE CALL A Divine Call The first great truth we learn in the opening portion of Abraham’s history is the blessed character of the call of God. From Stephen’s address, recorded in Acts 7:1-60, we learn that "the God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia." Here then we discover that which distinguishes the call from every other call, it comes from God — the God of glory. In this world with its cities and towers reaching up to heaven here is nothing that speaks of God, but only that which exalts and displays the glory of man. "The God of glory" speaks of another scene in which there is nothing of man but everything that displays God. This is the God

who, in wonderful grace appears to a man who was living in a world estranged from God and sunk in idolatry. It is then the glory of the One that appears to Abraham that gives such importance to the call, and gives faith its authority and power to answer to the call. A Separating Call

Secondly, we learn that the call is a separating call. The word to Abraham is, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house." Abraham is not told to remain in the city of Ur and deal with man's wickedness, or attempt to improve its social condition, or reform its domestic ways, or attempt to make it a better and a brighter world. He is called to come out of it in every form. He is to leave the political world - "thy country"; the social world — "thy kindred," and the family world — "thy father's house." The call today is no less definite. The world around us is a world that has the form of godliness without the power - the world of corrupt Christendom; and the Epistle that tells us that we are partakers of the heavenly calling exhorts us to separate from its corruption. We are to "Go forth therefore unto Him [Jesus] without the camp, bearing His reproach" (Hebrews 13:13). It is not that we are to despise government — it is still God's appointment. Nor can we neglect family ties — they are ordered of God. Nor are we to cease to be courteous, and kind, and do good to all men as we have opportunity. But, as believers we are called from taking part in political activities of the world, the social round, and the whole sphere in which unconverted members of our families find their pleasure without God. We are not asked to reform the world or seek to improve its condition, but to come out from it. The word is still, "Come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Corinthians 6:17-18). An Assuring Call

Thirdly, if the call of God separates Abraham from this present world, it is in view of bringing into another world "a land," that God says, "I will show thee." If the God of glory appears to Abraham it is in order to bring Abraham into the glory of God. Thus the wonderful address of Stephen that commences with the God of glory appearing to a man on earth, ends with a Man appearing in the glory of God in heaven. In closing his address, Stephen looks up stedfastly into heaven and sees the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and he says, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God." Looking upon Christ in the glory we see the wonderful purpose that God has in His heart when He calls us out of this present world. He has called us to glory, to be like Christ and with Christ in a scene where everything speaks of God and all that He is in the infinite love of His heart.

God does not say to Abraham, "If you answer to the call I will immediately give you possession of the land," but God says, "I will show thee the land." So God gives us with Stephen, if we answer to His call, to see the King in His beauty and the land that is very far off. We look up and see Christ in the glory. An Advantageous Call

Fourthly, there is great present blessing for the one who answers to the call. As separated from this present evil world, God says to Abraham, "I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great." The men of this world seek to make a great name for themselves; they say, "Let us make us a name." But God says to the separated man, "I will bless thee and make thy name great." The tendency of our natural hearts is always to seek to make a name for ourselves, and the flesh will seize upon anything, even the things of God, to exalt itself. This tendency was seen even among the disciples of the Lord when they had a strife as to which

of them should be accounted the greatest. The scattering of man at Babel, and the divisions of Christendom, as well as every strife among the people of God, can be traced to this one root — the vanity of the flesh seeking to make itself great. The lowly mind of the Lord Jesus was to make Himself of no reputation. "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him and given Him a Name which is above every name." God has made His Name great, and to the one that has His lowly mind and follows Him outside the camp in answer to the call, God says, "I will make thy name great." God can make a much greater name for the believer in His world of glory than we can make for ourselves in this present evil world.

If honestly confessed, it would be found that the true motive for many remaining in a false position, is the secret desire to be great, and thus they shrink from the path of obscurity outside the religious world of the day. Can we not see in Scripture, as in daily experience, that those who have been spiritually great among the people of God have ever been separated men — men who have answered to the call of God; while any departure from the separated path has led to the loss of influence and all true spiritual greatness among the people of God. A Beneficial Call

Fifthly, God says to Abraham, "Thou shalt be a blessing." In the outside path, not only would Abraham, himself be blessed, but, he would be a blessing to others. We do well to mark the import of these words. How often a believer remains in an association which he would admit is not according to the Word of God on the plea that he will be more useful to others than in the outside place of separation. However, God does not say to Abraham, "If you stop in Ur of the Chaldees, or in the halfway house It Haran you will be a blessing," but, answering to God’s call he is told, "Thou shalt be a blessing." A Preserving Call

Sixthly, Abraham is told that in the outside place he would have the preserving care of God. He may indeed have to face opposition and trial, for it is ever true that ’he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey" (Isaiah 59:15), but God says to the separated man, "I will bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee." The separated man is preserved from many a trial that overtakes the believer who remains in association with the world. The mercy of the Lord saved Lot from the doom of Sodom, but, in that false association he lost everything — wife, children, wealth, and name. An Effectual Call

Seventhly, acting in faith in God’s word Abraham is old, "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." Me know the use that the Spirit of God makes of this promise. He says, "The scripture foreseeing that God would justify the heathen on the principle of faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed" (Galatians 3:8). Abraham did not, and could not foresee the far reaching effect of the principle of faith on which he acted in answering to the call of God, but God foresaw that it was the one way of blessing for all the families of the earth. So now in our little measure, none but God can foresee the far reaching effect in blessing for others that may result from one soul that in simple and whole-hearted faith, answers to the call of God. The Hindrance to Answering the Call of God

We have seen the blessed promises that are connected with the call of God, and we shall learn how faith responds to the call. First, however, in this deeply instructive history, we are permitted to see how often the man of faith may be hindered for a time from answering to the call. From Stephen’s address, recorded in Acts 7:1-60, we learn that the call came to Abraham, "when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran." In answering to this call he is hindered by the

ties of nature. The call came to Abraham, but nature apparently can at times profess great zeal in answering to the call, and even take the lead, for we read, "Terah took Abram . . . and went forth from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan." Nature may essay to tread the path of faith, and, at the start, do the right thing with the best of intentions; but in its self-confidence nature always undertakes to do more than it has the power to accomplish. Thus it comes to pass that while Terah leaves Ur "to go to the land of Canaan," he never reaches the land. Nature stops halfway at Haran, and there he dwells to the day of his death. But what of Abraham, the man of God? For a time he allows himself to be hindered from fully obeying the call of God. It was not simply that his father was with him but he allows himself to be led by his father, as we read, "Terah took Abram." The result being that he stops short of the land to which he is called. So we read, in Stephen's address, he came "out of the land of the Chaldeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed into this land."

How many of us have been hindered for a time from taking the separate path, consistent with the call of God, by some loved relative. The call reaches the believer; he acknowledges the truth, but delays to answer to it because some near relative is not prepared for the outside place. The soul clings to the hope that by waiting a little the relative will be brought to see the call, and then both can act together. Faith, however, cannot lift nature up to its own level, though, alas, nature can drag down and hinder the man of faith. Many pleas can be raised to excuse this halfway halt, but in reality it is putting the claims of nature above the call of God. Then, as in Abram's history, God may have to roll death into the family circle and remove the one that we allowed to hinder us in obeying God's call. Thus it was not until his Father was dead that Abram fully answered to the call of God. To walk with God! Oh fellowship Divine!

Man's highest state on earth — Lord, be It mine! With Thee may I a close communion hold, To Thee the deep recesses of my heart unfold:

Yes, tell Thee all — each weary care and grief Into Thy bosom pour, till there I find relief.

Oh! let me walk with Thee, Thou Mighty One!

Lean on Thine arm, and trust Thy love alone; With Thee hold converse sweet, where'er I go;

Thy smile of love my highest bliss below; With Thee transact life's business, doing all With single aim for Thee, as Thou dost call. My every comfort at Thy hand receive, My every talent to Thy glory give.

Thy counsel seek in every trying hour, In all my weakness trust Thy mighty power.

Oh! may this high companionship be mine And all my life by its reflection shine. My great, my wise, my never-failing Friend, Whose love no change can know, no turn, no end! My Saviour-God! Who gav'st Thy life for me, Let nothing come between my heart and Thee! From Thee no thought, no secret would I keep, But on Thy breast my tears of anguish weep. My every wound to Thee I take to heal, For Thou art touched with every pang I feel In Thee, and Thee alone, I now confide And Thee I'd follow, as my Lord and Guide.

Thy Holy Spirit for my guide and guest.

Whate'er my lot, I must be safe and blest.

Wash’d in Thy blood, from all my guilt made clean, I in Thy righteousness alone am seen:

Thy home, my home — Thy God and Father mine!

Dead to the world — my life is hid with Thine; Its lightest honours fade before my view — Its pleasures, I can trample on them too. With Thee, by faith I walk in crowds alone, Making to Thee my wants and wishes known:

Drawing from Thee my daily strength in prayer, Finding Thine arm sustains me everywhere:

While through the clouds of sin and woe, the light Of coming glory shines more sweetly bright; And this my daily boast, my aim, my end, That my Redeemer is my God — my Friend!

Faith and Unbelief

Genesis 12:4-20

Abraham has been set free from the ties of nature, though at the painful cost of death coming into the family circle. After his father was removed by death, Abraham obeys the call, as we read, "So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken unto him."

He takes Lot, his nephew, with him, and Lot, with his worldly-mindedness, will prove an encumbrance to him. In the case of his father, Abram who was called allowed nature to lead, for "Terah took Abram," and this became a deadly hindrance. In the case of the nephew, Abram takes the lead, for we read "Abram took... Lot," and therefore, while this may become a weight, it cannot hinder faith answering to the call. When nature took the lead, we read, "They went forth. . . from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan." But they never reach the land under the leading of Terah. Now, when faith takes the lead we gain read, "They went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came" v. 5). A Contrast

Arriving in Canaan, they find "the Canaanite was then in the land." This is deeply significant. Of Abraham, God had said, "I will bless thee." Of Canaan, God had said, "Cursed be Canaan." If God brings Abraham — the man of blessing — into the land of promise, he at once discovers that the Devil has already brought into that very land the man of the curse. In this way the Devil seeks to thwart the purpose of God, and hinder the man of faith from entering into possession of the land. A Comparison So with the Christian, he is called out of the present world, he is a partaker of the heavenly calling, he is blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places. But, answering to the call and leaving the world, he finds that he is opposed by "spiritual wickedness in high places" (Ephesians 6:12). The believer that seeks to enter into his spiritual blessings will find there is arrayed against him spiritual wickedness seeking to prevent him taking the heavenly ground that is the only true and proper portion of the Church. For Abraham, Ur of the Chaldees was in the past; the possession of the land was yet future. In the meantime he had neither the world that he had left, nor the better world to which he was going. This, too, is the position of the Christian who answers to the call of God. He has left this present evil world and he has not yet reached the world to come.

What then, we may ask, is the portion of the one who answers to the call, and what will sustain him in this outside position? Here the story of Abram is rich with instruction and encouragement.

Obedience of Faith

First, be it noted, that the great principle on which Abraham acted was the principle of faith. Obviously, if he has left one world, and has not reached the other, he has nothing for natural sight. It is not that he did not see, but, what he saw was by faith. Thus we read, "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed"; and, again; "By faith he sojourned in the land of promise." He, and his, lived by faith, and finally we read, "These all died in faith" (Hebrews 11:8-9, Hebrews 11:13).

Path of Faith

Secondly, answering to the call of God on the principle of faith, Abraham, and those with him, became 'strangers and pilgrims." As the Holy Spirit, in the New Testament, can say of them, they "confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Hebrews 11:13). This comes before us very strikingly in his history. In Haran, where Abraham was detained for a time, we read, he "dwelt there"; but, arrived in the land, we read he "pitched his tent" as one that had no certain dwelling place. Moreover, we read that he "passed through the land." As a stranger he had but a tent in his world; as a pilgrim he was passing through to another world.

Portion of Faith

Thirdly, we learn what sustained Abraham in this pilgrim path. We are told, "The LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land." Mark well these two things. First, the twice repeated statement "the LORD appeared" unto him; secondly the land is set before him as a future possession. He sees the King in His beauty and the land that is very far off. He pursued his journey as a stranger and a pilgrim in the light of the glory of the God who had called him, and the blessedness of the land to which he was going. So we read in the New Testament, "He looked for a city which hath foundations," and again, He looked for "a better country, that is, an heavenly" (Hebrews 11:10, Hebrews 11:16). Nor is it otherwise with ourselves. It is only as we have Christ Himself before us in His glory, and the blessedness of the heavenly home to which we are going that we shall, in any little measure, bear the stranger and pilgrim character. It is not enough to know the doctrine of Christ, and that heaven lies before us at the end of the journey, but, like the Apostle, the desire of each heart should be, "That I may know Him," and "apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus" (Php 3:10, Php 3:12).

Taking a place outside this world in answer to the call, it is possible to grow in personal acquaintance with the Lord Himself, for He has said, "He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him."

Response of Faith

Fourthly, After the LORD appeared to Abraham, we immediately read, "There builded he an altar." This surely speaks of worship. In the Epistle to the Hebrews those who "go forth" unto Christ without the camp, not only take up their pilgrim character, as having no continuing city, but they become worshippers who "offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually" (Hebrews 13:13).

Abraham not only realized something of the glory of the land in the far future, but he caught a glimpse of the glory of the One that had appeared to him. The gift of the land might well call forth

his thanksgiving, but the blessedness of the Giver made him a worshipper. It is ever thus, for worship is the outflow of a heart that is filled with the glory of the Person we adore.

Resource of Faith

Fifthly, Abraham "called upon the Name of the LORD." This speaks of dependence upon the Lord. Whatever his needs, whatever the privations of his pilgrim journey, whatever opposition he may have to meet, whatever temptations might cross his path, he had an unfailing resource — he could call upon the Name of the Lord. In every day of difficulty the godly find their resource in the Lord. In the day of ruin before the flood there were those who, like Cain, "went out from the presence of the LORD"; but, there were also the godly who "began. . . to call upon the Name of the LORD" (Genesis 4:16, Genesis 4:26). So in the dark days of Malachi the godly found their resource in the LORD, for we read, they "thought upon His Name" (Malachi 3:16). In the early days of the Church, believers were known as those who "called on this Name" (Acts 9:21). In the midst of their persecutions it was to the Lord that they turned. And in the midst of the ruin of these last days, we are assured that there will be still those "that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:22).

However striking the faith of Abraham, we are made to realize that he is a man of like passions with ourselves. No one takes the path of faith without being tested. The test is allowed to discover, on the one hand our weakness, and on the other the grace and faithfulness of God. The Faithlessness of Abraham In Abraham’s history the test came in the form of a famine. It was a severe test for "the famine was grievous in the land." If the LORD allows the famine, the LORD can surely meet the needs of His own in the famine. However, under the pressure of his need, Abraham allows the circumstances to come between his soul and the LORD. Instead of calling upon the LORD, he followed the dictates of mere reason, or common sense, and, for a time, stepped out of the path of faith and "went down into Egypt." Instead of counting upon God to sustain him he goes down to the world for help.

Having taken this false step, he finds, that though his immediate needs are met, he is faced with fresh difficulties occasioned by his false position. He fears that he will be killed in order to satisfy the lusts of Egypt.

Having taken a position in which he can no longer count upon God to preserve him, he is left to his own resources to meet this fresh difficulty. Left to his own devices he sinks below the level of the world and acts a lie. With this equivocation he seeks to protect himself at the expense of his wife.

Unbelief, carrying its own judgment, constantly leads into the very evil, one seeks to avoid. As it has been said, "The sons of men would build a tower lest they should be scattered abroad, and the Lord scattered them because they built it. Abram, fearing lest Pharaoh should take his wife, says she is his sister (as if God would not preserve him), and therefore Pharaoh takes her into his house" (J.N.D.). So again, at a later day in similar circumstances, Elimelech leaves the land of God in order to escape the fear of death by famine, only to find that death awaits him in the land of Moab (Ruth 1:1-3).

Abraham finds indeed, by this false step, relief from his immediate need, and even acquires riches, but at what a cost. For, in Egypt, he can pitch no tent and raise no altar, nor call upon the Name of the LORD. The Faithfulness of Abraham’s God

Yet, in spite of all failure, God is faithful to His own. The gifts and calling of God are without repentance. God does not give up His people when they break down. He acts on our behalf, though in His governmental ways we have to suffer for our folly. Thus it was that God acted on behalf of his failing servant. So we read, "the LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai Abram’s wife." In result, when the deceit is discovered, Abraham is dismissed by the world, for, Pharaoh says, "Behold thy wife, take her, and go thy way." And Pharaoh takes care that he does go, for he "commanded his men concerning him: and they sent him away, and his wife, and all that he had." Alas, when the world dismisses the people of God, not because of their faithful witness to God, but, because of their own shameful conduct!

Thus, in the goodness of God, His poor servant is set free from a false position, but not without reproach and shame.

Lord Jesus, Thou who only art The endless source of purest joy, Oh! come and fill this longing heart; May nought but Thee my thoughts employ.

Teach me on Thee to fix my eye, For none but Thee can satisfy. The joys of earth can never fill The heart that’s tasted of Thy love; No portion would I seek until I reign with Thee, my Lord, above, When I shall gaze upon Thy face And know more fully all Thy grace. When from Thy radiant throne on high Thou didst my fall and ruin see, Thou cam’st on earth for me to die, That I might share that throne with Thee.

Loved with an everlasting love, My hopes, my joys are all above.

Oh, what is all that earth can give?

I’m called to share in God’s own joy.

Dead to the world, in Thee I live, In Thee I’ve bliss without alloy:

Well may I earthly things resign;

"All things" are mine, and I am Thine!

Till Thou shalt come to take me home, Be this my one ambition, Lord, Self, sin, the world, to overcome, Fast clinging to Thy faithful Word:

More of Thyself each day to know, And more into Thine image grow.

Refusing and Choosing

Genesis 13:1-18 The reality of Abraham’s restoration to the path of faith is speedily put to the test. Circumstances arise that manifest he is once again living in the light of the heavenly country, and can therefore afford to refuse the well-watered plain that is chosen by his worldly-minded nephew.

Recovery from Failure

Abraham has been dismissed from Egypt. Where he goes is a matter of indifference to the world. Abraham however, was a true man of faith, though, like ourselves, he at times breaks down in the path of faith. Having tasted the blessedness of the outside place, nothing will satisfy his soul but getting back into the place of blessing from which his feet had strayed. So we read, "Abram went

up out of the land of Egypt. . . into the south . . . and he went on his journeys from the south even to Bethel, unto the place where his tent had been . . . unto the place of the altar." As with every truly restored soul he retraces his path step by step until, once again, he is found in his stranger and pilgrim character with his tent, as a worshipper with his altar, and as a dependent man calling upon the Name of the Lord.

Result of Failure The restoration of Abraham is complete; but the result of Abraham’s failure is seen in others. A saint never fails without affecting others for evil, though he himself may be restored. The effect of his failure upon Lot at once comes to light. In Terah we have seen the man of nature who can make a fair profession, but cannot take the path of faith that leads outside the world. In Abraham, we have seen the man of faith who, acting according to the word of the LORD, takes the outside place, though at times he may fail in this path. In Lot we see a true believer, who takes the outside place, not in faith in God, but under the influence of man. Already we have read that when Abraham departed from Haran, "Lot went with him" (Genesis 12:4). Again, when Abraham went up out of Egypt, we read, "Lot went with him" (Genesis 13:1). Now, for the third time Lot is described as the man "which went with Abram."

Lot represents a large class who take up a right position outside the world, but do so under the influence of a friend or relative rather than from personal exercise and faith in God. From the beginning of his path Lot was characterized by walking in the light of another. Alas! in different ways, and measures, how often we may, like Lot, act with those who have faith without having it ourselves, only to find that we shall not stand when tried by temptation. When the test comes, believers who walk in the light of another will break down and give up a path which has no attraction for the flesh, about which they never had any exercise, and for which they have no personal faith. The Snare of Riches

How often, too, the test today takes the form that it did in the story of Abraham and Lot. As we read, "there was strife." We learn further that the immediate cause of the strife was their possessions. We do well to notice the twice-repeated statement that they were not able to dwell together, and the deeply significant cause of the division, "for their substance was great." How often, since then, believers have been divided by jealousy of one another’s spiritual gifts or temporal riches. The abuse of spiritual gifts was a source of division in the assembly at Corinth. The apostle can say to this assembly, "In everything ye are enriched by Him, in all utterance and in all knowledge." But these very riches became a cause of strife and division, for, says the apostle, "There is among you envying and strife, and divisions"; and he adds that they were "puffed up for one against another" (1 Corinthians 1:5; 1 Corinthians 3:3; 1 Corinthians 4:6). Poverty might have led them to cling to one another; their riches became a cause of division. In the case of Abraham and Lot their temporal riches became the occasion of division. We may well ask, ’Where were these temporal riches acquired?" When first Abraham entered upon the path of faith, and Lot went with him, they took "all their substance." But it was no cause of strife (Genesis 12:5). In Egypt, however, Abraham acquires great wealth so that after his restoration we read, "He was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold." The wealth that he acquires through turning aside from the path of faith becomes a cause of strife and division between brethren. Striving together these brothers cease to be a witness to God before the Canaanites and the Perizzites that dwelled in the land The Position of Faith

Nevertheless, Abraham is a restored man in a true position with a right motive; whereas Lot, though in a right position is only a follower of others. Therefore, while strife becomes the sad occasion of revealing the worldly-mindedness of Lot, it also brings to light the heavenly-mindedness of Abraham, who can renounce things seen. Abraham says, "Let there be no strife, I pray, between me and thee. . . for we be brethren." The man which is in a position for which he has not faith will in the end become a source of strife among brethren and had better separate from the man whose faith he cannot follow.

Abraham, with the heavenly country before him, can afford to renounce the present world with its prospect of ease and plenty. Lot can choose, and if he takes the best according to nature and sight, Abraham will be content to take the path that God chooses for him, be it rough or smooth, knowing that it will end in the land of promise with all its blessedness. The Choice of the Flesh

Under the influence of others, Lot had accepted the outside path: left to his own choice he shows that the world is in his heart (vv. 10-13). Without seeking direction from God, he chooses his path according to sight. "Lot lifted up his eyes and beheld the plain of Jordan." It was an alluring sight and had promise of present ease and plenty. Everywhere there was water for his flocks, without the labour of digging wells. So fruitful was the plain that it was "even as the garden of the LORD." Most significant of all, it was "like the lend of Egypt." Alas! Lot having followed Abraham into Egypt had acquired a taste for Egypt’s pleasures and thus had strengthened the desire for worldly ease and plenty. So Lot chooses all the plain of Jordan, gives up the separate path, for which he never had personal faith, and forever leaves the land of Canaan. There was nothing gross or wrong in choosing a well-watered plain; but it proves that the heart is not set on the unseen land of God’s promise. Moreover, the real danger of the well-watered plains is that Satan had reared Sodom in their midst.

Abraham remains in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwells in the cities of the plain. Having left the path of faith and chosen the path of sight, and worldly ease, his way is ever downward, for we next read that he ’pitched his tent toward Sodom." Of this city we are told "The men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly." We shall yet learn that for Lot there is no recovery. Lower and lower he sinks, until at last he passes from the scene under a cloud of shame and dishonour. The Confession of Faith

Abraham, freed from the encumbrance of his worldly-minded nephew, receives fresh communications from the LORD. Lot had allowed himself to be guided by the sight of his eyes apart from the direction of the LORD. The result being that the sight of his eyes stirred the lust of his heart, and his feet followed the choice of his heart.

Now Abraham uses his eyes, but at the direction of the LORD, for, when Lot was separated from him, the LORD said, "Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art." He is to look in every direction at the land which the LORD has given him. And well for us, when freed from the weight of those who have no faith for the outside path, if we too set our minds on things above and "look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are unseen," and seek to enjoy every part of the revelation that God has given to us of the world to come, the heavenly country with its city which hath foundations. In this sense, we can still answer to the LORD’S direction to Abraham when he said, "Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and the breadth of it, for I will give it unto thee." Set free from mere followers, rising above all petty strife and allowing the

LORD to choose his path, Abraham enjoys a rich unfolding of the world to come for which in patience he waits. In the meantime he moves through the land with his tent and his altar. This world is a wilderness wide, I have nothing to seek or to choose;

I've no thought in the waste to abide;

I have nought to regret nor to lose. The Lord is Himself gone before;

He has marked out the path that I tread:

It's as sure as the love I adore;

I have nothing to fear nor to dread.

There is but that One in the waste, Which His footsteps have marked as His own; And I follow in diligent haste To the seats where He's put on His crown.

'Tis the treasure I've found in His love That has made me a pilgrim below; And 'tis there, when I reach Him above, As I'm known, all His fullness I'll know.

Till then, 'tis the path Thou hast trod, My delight and my comfort shall be:

I'm content with Thy staff and Thy rod, Till with Thee all Thy glory I see.

— J.N.D.

Called from above, and heavenly men by birth Who once were but the citizens of earth) As pilgrims here, we seek a heavenly home, Our portion, in the ages yet to come.

There all the saints of ev'ry clime shall meet, And each with all shall all the ransomed greet, But oh! the height of bliss, my Lord, shall be To owe it all, and share it all, with Thee.

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

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

Thy lips the Father's name to us reveal; That burning pow'r in all Thy words we feel, Then to our raptured hearts we hear Thee tell The heavenly glories which Thou know'st so well. No curse of law, in Thee was sov'reign grace, And now what glory in Thine unveiled face!

Thou didst attract the wretched and the weak, Thy joy the wand'rers and the lost to seek. That precious stream of water and of blood Which from Thy pierced side so freely flowed, Has put away our sins of scarlet dye, Washed us from ev'ry stain, and brought us nigh.

We are but strangers here, we do not crave A home on earth, which gave Thee but a grave;

Thy cross has severed ties which bound us here, Thyself our Treasure in a brighter sphere. As I bid adieu to the world's fancied pleasures You pity my weakness. Alas! did you know The joys of salvation, that best hidden treasure, Would you have me forsake them? Ah never, ah no! In the gay scenes of life I was happiness wooing, But ah, in its stead I encountered but woe; And found I was only a phantom pursuing, I never once found it. Ah never, ah no!

How bright now the sunbeams of glory are shining Around my sweet path as to heaven I go; With Christ in my heart on His promise reclining, Shall I yield up my treasure? Ah never, ah no! But now in the path which you call melancholy, I drink of the joys that the world does not know;

Come taste them and try them, you'll own your past folly, Nor again bid me flee them. Ah never, ah no! By the counsels of Jesus my feet are directed, My faithful Companion, we intimate grow; With His love I am blest, by His arm I'm protected; Would you have me forsake them? Ah never, ah no!

Victory and Defeat

Genesis 14:1-24 In Genesis 12:1-20 we have traced the blessedness of the path of faith in answer to the call of God, and how our steps can slip unless held by the power of the Lord. In Genesis 13:1-18, we have seen the renunciation of the world by the believer who reads the path of faith; and, in contrast, the sorrowful choice of the world by the reliever who allows himself to be governed by sight.

Genesis 14:1-24 presents the conflicts of the world - nations warring against nations - during which the believer, who has refused the world, obtains the victory; while the believer, who walks by sight, falls under its power. Further we learn that the world's conflicts will finally issue through the judgments of God in the deliverance of God's people and the establishment of the reign of Christ as Priest and King. This is typically set forth in Melchizedek, king of Salem.

Conflict (Genesis 14:1-11) The chapter opens with a solemn picture of this present evil world. It is a scene in which the nations form themselves into groups, and enter into alliances to carry out their schemes of aggrandizement, and to defend themselves from attacks.

Moreover, it is a lawless world where men are forced to serve governments against their will, or rebel against governments to obtain their liberty (Genesis 14:4).

Thus the whole world, whether in high places or in its lower spheres — the mount or the wilderness (Genesis 14:6) — becomes a scene of warring interests, and selfish conflicts.

Capture (Genesis 14:12) The account of these world conflicts leads to what is so deeply instructive — the contrast between the believer who is governed by sight, and the one who walks by faith. In the course of these conflicts, Lot, the man of sight, falls a captive to the world; Abraham, the man of faith, is victorious over the world.

Thus we read that the victorious kings "took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed." It is significant to notice that Lot, of whom we read in a former chapter, who chose all the plain of Jordan, and "pitched his tent toward Sodom" (Genesis 13:12), has now taken a further step on his downward course; for here we read, he "dwells in Sodom." We may be sure that it was never Lot's intention to dwell in Sodom, when he pitched his tent toward Sodom. But one false step leads to another. Drawing near to the world, he is soon in the world; and dwelling in the world he becomes involved in its conflicts, and falls a captive to its power.

It is still true that the believer who settles down in the world, has no power against the world. Where there is not the faith that keeps the coming of glory in view, there is not the faith to overcome the present evil world. This is the case of Lot. He never overcame, but was constantly overcome by one evil influence after another. He accepted the outside path under the leading of

Abraham rather than of faith in God. When the test comes he falls under the influence of fair prospects that appeal to the sight of the eyes. Having drawn near to the world he falls still further under its influence, and settles down in Sodom. Finally, dwelling in Sodom, he finds in the day of conflict he is a lonely man. without strength, without friends to help, and unable to count upon the support of God. Powerless in the day of battle, he falls a captive to his enemies.

Contrast (Genesis 14:13-16) In contrast to Lot, who chose the world, and becomes its captive, there is presented before us the man who renounced the world and is victorious over it. Lot, as we have seen, is unprepared in the day of battle; Abraham, dwelling as one apart, is ready for conflict. He has in his household those who have already been trained for conflict, and he is ready to fight the good fight — not, indeed, Like the world for personal aggrandizement, or to obtain the riches of this world, but to rescue a brother who has fallen under its power. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, and we lo not wrestle against flesh and blood. None the less the Christian conflict is very real. We contend for the truth, and seek to deliver those who are in danger of falling into the religious world, or have already been taken captive in its toils.

Paul, living in the light of another world and glorying in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by whom the world was crucified to Paul and he to it, fights the good fight and escapes the snare of those who would be rich whereby they pierce themselves through with many sorrows. Se has great conflict for those who were in danger of falling under the power of the religious world (Colossians 2:1).

Likewise Jude, in the spirit of Abraham, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh, is ready earnestly to contend for the faith, can have compassion on those believers who have been taken captive by the world, and seek to pull them out of the fire (Jude 1:3,Jude 1:22-23).

Compensation (Genesis 14:17-24)

Moreover, Abraham is not only victorious over the hostility of the world, but he is proof against its horrors and its gifts. We may rise above the world’s enmity, and yet fall beneath its kindness. And we are never more in danger of a fall than in the moment of a victory. This the enemy knows full well and so comes with his temptations at a moment when we may be off guard. Thus with Abraham, "the king of Sodom went out to meet Abram after his return" from his triumph over the opposing kings. But if the king of Sodom comes to tempt Abraham, the king of Salem is there to support him. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Holy Spirit has given us the spiritual significance of this fine scene. There Melchizedek is introduced as a type to set forth the glories of Christ. His name, and that of his country, signify that he was King of Righteousness and King of Peace. Moreover, he was "the priest of the Most High God" (Hebrews 7:1-3). As a king, he brings righteousness and peace to his subjects; as a priest, he leads the praises of his people to God. As the representative of God before man, Melchizedek blessed Abraham on behalf of God; as the representative of man before God, he blessed the Most High God on behalf of Abraham.

Thus, in the coming Millennial days, God will be known as the Most High, who will deliver His earthly people from their enemies and deal in judgment with every hostile power. Then, indeed, Christ will shine forth as King and Priest. So we are told by direct prophecy, "He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon His throne: and He shall be a priest upon His throne; and the counsel of peace shall be between them both" (Zechariah 6:13). He will be the true King of

Righteousness, the King of Peace, and the Priest of the Most High God.

Melchizedek having brought forth bread and wine, the needs of Abraham are met and his joy secured, and thus he can dispense with the gifts of this world. Abraham has lifted up his hand unto the Lord, the Most High God, the one who possesses all the fulness of heaven and earth. Blessed by God, he will take nothing from the world lest it should say, "I have made Abram rich."

Blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places, and enriched with the unsearchable riches of Christ, the believer can rise above the seductions of this world, refuse its gifts and honours, and pursue in peace the life of faith in the path of separation. And faith treads this path in the light of the world to come. Faith knows that all the conflicts of this world will come to their end in the glorious reign of Christ, when His poor failing people will be delivered from all their enemies and righteousness and peace will be established, as we read, "He shall judge the people with righteousness and thy poor with judgment. The mountains shall bring peace to the people'' (Psalms 72:2-3).

Father, Thy sovereign love has sought Captives to sin, gone far from Thee: The work that Thine own Son hath wrought Has brought us back in peace and free. And now as sons before Thy face, With joyful steps the path we tread, Which leads us on to that bright place Prepared for us by Christ our Head.

Thou gav'st us in eternal love, To Him to bring us home to Thee, Suited to Thine own thought above, As sons like Him, with Him, to be In Thine own house. There love divine Fills the bright courts with cloudless joy; But 'tis the love that made us Thine, Fills all that house without alloy.

O boundless grace! what fills with joy Unmingled all who enter there, God's nature, love without alloy, Our hearts are given e'en now to share.

God's righteousness with glory bright, Which with its radiance fills that sphere, E'en Christ, of God the power and light, Our title is that light to share.

O mind divine, so must it be That glory all belongs to God:

O Love divine, that did decree We should be part, thro' Jesus' blood.

O keep us, Love divine, near Thee, That we our nothingness may know, And ever to Thy glory be Walking in faith while here below.

Sonship and Inheritance

Genesis 15:1-21 In Genesis 11:1-32, Genesis 12:1-20, Genesis 13:1-18, Genesis 14:1-24 we have seen the public witness of Abraham before men. In the second portion of his history, presented in Genesis 15:1-21, Genesis 16:1-16, Genesis 17:1-27, Genesis 18:1-33, Genesis 19:1-38, Genesis 20:1-18, Genesis 21:1-34, we have the personal exercises of his soul before God. It is clear that Abram's departure from Haran, his tent, his altar, his renunciation of the world, and his victory over the kings, were all matters of public knowledge, setting forth the Life of faith and the glorious end to which it leads. Now we are to learn his inner exercises that lie behind his pubic testimony.

It is of the deepest moment to realize we are not merely called to be witnesses of facts that are true, but to testify of truths that have affected our own souls. In these marvellous scenes there is personal intercourse between God and a man of like passion with ourselves. God appears to Abraham in visions and by personal visits, in which He talks with Abraham and even accepts his hospitality. In these communications God reveals the purpose of His heart concerning Abraham and his posterity, and treating him as a friend, discloses His mind concerning the world.

Revelation of God (Genesis 15:1)

Abraham, on his side, can with full confidence spread out his needs before God, tell out his difficulties and lead for others. Such condescending grace on the part of God, and confiding trust on the part of Abraham, is deeply instructive to ourselves. In the light of the full revelation of God as our Father, it is possible for believers to enjoy yet greater intimacy with God, though in a less familiar manner. We may well challenge our hearts as to how much we know of this blessed intimacy that, in all the sweet confidence of children, can bring every difficulty to God, spread out our needs before Him, and, in the confidence of love, plead on behalf of others. We are at least encouraged by these lovely scenes to cultivate this intimacy with God. The occasion of these fresh communications is deeply instructive. Abraham had just refused this world’s gifts and honours. Now we read, "After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." Having aroused the enmity of the world, over whom he had gained a victory, he will need a shield. Having refused the gifts of this world he will have the rewards of God. And God’s protection, and God’s rewards, far exceed all that this world can offer. With God for our shield we need not fear the reprisals of defeated enemies: with God for our reward we can dispense with this world’s gifts.

Response of Faith (Genesis 15:2-3) The response to this communication is beautiful in its simple trust. God had said, "I am . . . thy exceeding great reward." Abraham with the utmost confidence, taking God at His word, asks, If this be so, what wilt Thou give me? Moreover, he spreads out his need before God. He says, as it were, "You have spoken of my seed, You have promised me the land, but I go childless and all my possessions will pass to my servant, Eliezer. You have given me the land and spoken about my seed, but, behold, to me thou hast given no seed, and a servant is my heir."

Reward of Grace (Genesis 15:4) In reply the word of the LORD came to Abraham and, IS ever with God, His gifts exceed our requests. Abraham ad asked for a son, and, in reply, God promises him not only a son but also an inheritance for the seed. Sonship and inheritance are the two great themes of God’s reply. The word to Abraham is, "He that shall come forth of thine own bowels shall be thine heir," and, "I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur. . . to give thee this and to inherit it." The whole scene illustrates the truth of Romans 8:17, "If children then heirs." Sonship and m inheritance, whether for the earthly people of God or the heavenly, are inseparably connected. Our future prospects are connected with our character as sons. If we are sons, then we must be heirs. God does not have sons without providing for them an inheritance.

Reckoning of Righteousness (Genesis 15:5-7) But this beautiful picture illustrates a further truth, that believers are "all the sons of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26). Faith existed before, but this is the first time that we read that a man "believed in the LORD." We see, too, this faith illustrated in all its simplicity. Abraham is brought forth from his own circumstances, and all

that he is asked to do is to look, and listen, and believe. He is to look away from Sarah, himself, the earth, and everything of nature, and says the LORD, "Look now toward heaven." And as he looks to the stars, he is to listen to what God says, "So shall thy seed be." Then we read, "He believed in the LORD; and He counted it to him for righteousness."

We know how the Spirit of God has used this picture in Romans 4:1-25, to set forth the way the believer in Christ is accounted to be in a righteous condition before God. To us sinners, Christ is presented, and God says, as it were, "look" and "listen." Look toward heaven and fix your eye on Christ in glory, and listen to what God says about Christ. That He has died for all, that God is satisfied with Jesus and His work. Looking to Jesus, and listening to what God says, the needy soul believes in Jesus as the One that has died for him, and God says of the one that believes, he is reckoned by God to be clear of all his sins and in a righteous condition before God, and further, he is a child of God, and if a child then an heir.

Remission of Sins (Genesis 15:8-10)

Moreover, Abraham learns that the ground of all blessing must be sacrifice. So we have ever to remember that the everlasting basis of our blessing is the great sacrifice of Christ. "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission." There may be very different measures of appreciation of the sacrifice of Christ, probably set forth by the different animals that Abraham was told to offer, but sacrifice alone can secure the blessing.

Seeing that all blessing for us depends upon the great sacrifice of Christ, it will ever be the effort of the enemy to attack and belittle His mighty work. It is ours to contend for the truth and drive away every unclean bird that would deny the sacrifice and trample underfoot the blood of Christ.

Moreover, if the sacrifice is the ground of all blessing there must be on our side the individual appropriation by faith of the death of Christ. The "sinking sun," the "deep sleep," and the "horror of great darkness," all speak of the exercises of soul in entering into the deep meaning of the Cross. Did not Paul know something of these experiences when, after he had seen Christ in the glory, "he was three days without sight, and neither did eat or drink" (Acts 9:9)?

Further, Abraham has to learn that the road to the glory is a pathway of suffering. His seed would assuredly enter the Promised Land, but they will first pass through affliction. Thus the four truths of Romans 8:17, that we are sons of God, heirs of Christ, suffering with Christ, and going on to the glory, are exemplified in the story of Abraham, who learns that beyond the furnace of affliction there is the light of the glory.

Beyond the storms I’m going, Beyond this vale of tears, Beyond the floods o’erflowing, Beyond the changing years;

I’m going to the better land, By faith long since possessed: The glory shines before me, For this is not my rest. The glory shines before me, I know that all is well; My Father’s care is o’er me, His praises I would tell: The love of Christ constrains me, His blood has washed me white; Where Jesus is in glory, ’Tis home, and love, and light.

O Lord, we would delight in Thee, And on Thy care depend; To Thee in every trouble flee, Our never failing Friend. When human cisterns all are dried, Thy fullness is the same; May we with this be satisfied, And glory in Thy name. No good in creatures can be found, All, all is found in Thee;

We must have all things and abound, Through Thy sufficiency.

Thou who hast made our heaven secure Wilt here all good provide;

While Christ is rich, can we be poor?

Christ who for us has died!

O Lord, we cast each care on Thee, And triumph and adore;

Oh, that our great concern may be To love and praise Thee more! The Flesh and the Law

Genesis 16:1-16 In Genesis 15:1-21 we have learned that the blessing has been definitely promised to Abraham, in sovereign grace, on the ground of sacrifice; thus setting forth the great truth that every blessing, whether for God's earthly or heavenly people, comes to them in sovereign grace, and yet perfect righteousness, through the death of Christ. In this chapter we have the account of Abraham's attempt to secure the promise of the heir, through the flesh on the ground of works, or his own efforts. The Test

God has promised Abraham a son, and Abraham had believed God (Genesis 15:4-6). But His patience is put to the test, for we read, "Now Sarai, Abram's wife bare him no children." How then is he to obtain the heir? Under the test, his patience broke down: instead of waiting God's time he attempts to obtain the promised blessing by his own efforts. In the epistle to the Hebrews, Abraham is brought forward as the great example of those who "through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Hebrews 5:12-15). In his history, as so often with ourselves, we see that on occasions he breaks down in the very things of which, in the main, he is a striking example. In Genesis 12:1-20, as we have seen, his faith failed when put to the test. Here, in Genesis 16:1-16, his patience breaks down under a fresh test. The Temptation As in the former case, Egypt was at hand to tempt him from the path of faith by relieving him of all the exercises that such a path entails, so now the Egyptian maid is at hand to suggest relief from further waiting. Though himself restored, the result of his lapse into Egypt is still manifest. Something of the world had been introduced into his household which, if he acts in the flesh is ready to be used. How true it is that what a man soweth that shall he also reap. Through careless walk we can easily introduce something of the world into our homes, which in due time will give the flesh an opportunity to manifest itself. In Galatians 4:21-26 the Apostle Paul refers to this incident and gives us its spiritual meaning. He reminds the Galatian Assemblies that Abraham had two sons, one by a bondmaid, the other by the free woman, and that the son of the bondwoman was born after the flesh, but the son of the free woman was by promise. The Teaching

Then he tells us that these things are an allegory setting forth the two covenants — the covenant of law connected with Sinai, which leads to bondage, set forth by Hagar and her son; and the covenant of grace, connected with Jerusalem which is above, leading to liberty, set forth by Sarah and her son. The Tendency The Galatian believers, though truly converted and having the Spirit, were turning back to the law as a rule of life, and were thus, in practice making their blessing depend upon their own efforts. To use the language of the allegory they became the children of Sinai, and developed a character marked by the traits of the flesh. If connected with the liberty of Jerusalem above, which sets forth sovereign grace, they would have set forth the character of Christ. Instead of this they were, as the result of putting themselves under law, manifesting a

proud, rain-glorious spirit which led to envy, so that they were biting and devouring one another, and being drawn into he world (Galatians 4:21; Galatians 5:15, Galatians 5:26). The apostle longed that Christ might be formed in them, so that the beautiful character of Christ might shine forth from them (Galatians 4:19).

Turning then to the story of Abraham, we see that the only result of seeking to obtain the heir by his own fleshly efforts is to introduce into his household that which has the character of the flesh, "That which is born Of the flesh is flesh." Nature can only produce nature. So Abraham's natural efforts only produce the natural man that in due course will persecute the spiritual seed. The Tragedy In the meantime a jarring element is brought into the family. The one who represents the efforts of the flesh despises the one through whom the blessing will come (Genesis 15:4). Sarah and Hagar, setting forth what is of the flesh and what is of the Spirit, cannot agree, "for the flesh lusteth against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other" (Galatians 5:17). Moreover the man that is brought into his household gravitates toward the world, for he is found in the wilderness of Shur on the borders of Egypt (Genesis 5:7). He is, moreover, a hard character who is against every man, and stirs up every man against himself (Genesis 15:12). The Type The application of these truths to ourselves is plain. We may, like Abraham be true believers, and like the Galatians have the Spirit, and yet, in our daily life, we may make the law our rule of life. We may thus allow the thought that our being in the favour and grace of God our Father depends upon our own good walk and legal efforts. The results will be twofold. First, we develop a hard and self-righteous character that is proud of itself and jealous of others. Secondly, we shall fail to enjoy the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and so lack grace and love, and entirely fail to produce the fruit of the Spirit that sets forth the character of Christ (Galatians 5:1-6, Galatians 5:22). The Interpretation The interpretation given in Galatians shows that what is set forth in the allegory is not a sinner seeking justification by his works, but rather a believer, who is already justified, seeking holiness of life by his own legal efforts and in his own strength.

It is evident that Christendom has fallen into this Galatian legality. It is not that Christian truths have been entirely given up, but that the legal system set forth by Hagar, has been introduced into the Christian profession, so that there are very many true Christians kept in bondage of soul through seeking to regulate their lives by the law in order to walk well, and thus obtain the favour of God, instead of seeing that right walk flows from the blessed fact that through the death of Christ they are already in the everlasting favour of God, and can only walk rightly in the strength of Christ.

Typically, the story may set forth the history of Israel under the law seeking to obtain the promises by their own works. In result they find themselves, like Hagar, cast out of their land and wanderers in a wilderness world in which they are contrary to all men and every man against them. Nevertheless the nation is beloved or the father's sake, and hence the providential care of God is never withdrawn from them, even as Hagar found that in the wilderness there was a well and the angel of the LORD, and that God saw all her distress.

Child of God, by Christ's salvation, Rise o'er sin and fear and care — joy to find in ev'ry station, Something still to do or bear;

Think what Spirit dwells within thee!

Think what Father’s smiles are thine!

Think that Jesus died to win thee, Child of God, wilt thou repine?

Haste thee on from grace to glory, Armed by faith and winged by prayer, Heaven’s eternal day’s before thee, God’s right hand shall guide thee there;

Soon shall close thine earthly mission, Soon shall pass thy pilgrim days, Hope shall change to glad fruition, Faith to sight, and prayer to praise.

— H.L.

Lord, Thou hast drawn us after Thee, Now let us run and never tire;

Thy presence shall our comfort be, Thyself our hope, our sole desire. Our present Saviour, while no fear Nor sin can come if Thou art near.

What in Thy love possess we not? Our star by night, our sun by day, Our spring of life when parched with drought, Our wine to cheer, our bread to stay, Our strength, our shield, our safe abode, Our robe before the throne of God!

Unchangeable, Thy gracious love Our earthly path hath ceaseless viewed;

Ere knew our beating heart to move, Thy tender mercies still pursued;

Ever with us may they abide, And close us in on every side. The Almighty God and the Everlasting Covenant

Genesis 17:1-27 Listening to God’s Revelation of Himself (Genesis 17:1-2) In the Epistle to the Hebrews, we read of Abraham hat "after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promises" (Hebrews 6:12-15). The story of Hagar and Ishmael has shown that, under pressure he failed in patience. That story closed with the statement that "Abram was fourscore and six years old, when Hagar bare Ishmael to Abram." Now we read, "When Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram." For thirteen years he patiently endured. During these years there is no record of any communications to Abraham. God waits until all hope is over to obtaining the blessing by the efforts of the flesh.

Having experienced the futility of his own efforts to obtain the promised heir, and having been kept waiting until he is ninety and nine, and thus realized his utter weakness, the LORD appeared to Abraham and revealed Himself as "the Almighty God." This, as it has been pointed out, was a great advance upon former communications. In Genesis 15:1-21, we have read that God revealed Himself to Abraham as his shield and exceeding great reward. There it was a revelation of what God was for Abraham; here it is a revelation of what God is in Himself.

Connected with this revelation, the LORD said to Abraham, "Walk before Me, and be thou perfect." As we have seen, Abraham’s way had not been altogether perfect. Though he was a man of true faith and patience, in the matter of turning aside to Egypt he had failed in faith; in the matter of Hagar, he had failed in patience. Now, having learned his weakness, he learns that God is Almighty. If then, God is Almighty, God’s purposes and promises will surely come to fruition, however impossible their fulfilment may appear to nature, and sight, and the flesh. Abraham only

has to remember that God is Almighty and at once every difficulty will disappear, every obstacle will be surmounted, and in quiet faith and patience he will be enabled to wait for God to act in God's own time. No longer is Abraham to expect anything from nature. Everything depends upon God from first to last. So God can say, "I will make My covenant between Me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly." We can say, "If God will"; who but the Almighty God can rightly say, "I will"?

Falling on His Face Before God (Genesis 17:3) The effect of this fresh revelation on Abraham is striking. When the word of the LORD came to Abraham in a vision revealing what God was for Abraham, at once Abraham thought of himself, and, in happy confidence speaks to God, spreading out his needs, and stating his difficulties before God. Here, when God personally visits Abraham, revealing who He is in Himself, Abraham falls upon his face as a listener, and God speaks to him. He realizes his own nothingness in the presence of God's greatness, and at once he takes the lowly place on his face. The former communications led Abraham to think of himself, and his need. This revelation leads him to think of God, and forms in him a character that is consistent with the One that meets his need: He walks before God and is perfect.

How beautiful are these practical examples of the blessed intimacies between God and the believer! God so inspires Abraham with the confidence that He is for Him that Abraham can speak with God; then Abraham is brought into the lowly place before God so that God can speak with him. In our present day we require and have these different revelations of God. We need to know all that God is for us in His grace and love; and such knowledge leads to sweet intimacy and communion with God by which we can pour out our needs before Him, as to all our difficulties and trials. But we also have the revelation of all that God is in Himself as the Father. This revelation leads to a true sense of our nothingness before Him, while at the same time the heart delighting in its Object is formed into the likeness of the One upon whom we gaze. "We are changed into the same image from glory to glory." Thus whether in Abraham's day or in ours, the right appreciation of the revelation of all that the Lord is would lead to likeness to Himself. In this sense, we should walk before the Lord and be perfect.

Receiving Communications from God (Genesis 17:4)

Then we are permitted to hear the blessedness of these communications as God talks with Abraham. First, Abraham is told that the grace of God would flow out to the nations. If God is Almighty He can overcome every barrier and bless the Gentiles.

Secondly, in connection with the revelation of God as the Almighty, Abram's name is changed from Abram to Abraham, meaning "father of a multitude." Thus God puts honour upon His servant.

Thirdly, Abraham is told that he would be exceedingly fruitful. Not only through Abraham would nations be blessed, but through him there would be fruit for God upon earth.

Fourthly, while the nations would be blessed, yet Abraham and his seed would be in the closest relationship with God. "I will establish My covenant," said God, "between Me and thee and thy seed after thee." And that covenant will be an everlasting covenant by which God covenants to be the God of Abraham and his seed after him.

Fifthly, God not only makes an everlasting covenant, but secures to Abraham and his seed, "an everlasting possession.

Responsibility Towards God (Genesis 17:9-13)

These then are some of the blessings of the everlasting covenant that God makes with Abraham. The covenant presents God's settled purpose to bless, for seven times, in the course of this communication God says, "I will." Now Abraham learns that God looks for an answer in the believer's life to His own grace. Abraham is to walk before God and be perfect. As Christians we are not asked, even as Abraham was not asked, to walk well in order to obtain the blessing, but to walk in a way suited to God because we are blessed. To thus walk and be perfect before God, calls for dependence upon God and His Almighty power. But this involves the entire refusal of the flesh. To this end circumcision was introduced, as a sign that the flesh is to be mortified, if the walk is to be perfect before God. In Genesis 17:1-21, death was brought in as the ground of justification; here the refusal of the flesh, by that which speaks of death to the flesh, is in order to holiness of walk.

If God covenants to bless by His Almighty power, here must, on our side, be no confidence in the flesh or allowance of its activity. For the believer today, circumcision is, we know, "of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God" (Romans 2:29). The refusal of the flesh is not to be merely an outward neglecting of the body of which the world can take account, but the refusal of She flesh in all its inward workings in the heart — its self-confidence, self-righteousness, vanity and lusts - as that which has been condemned in the cross (Colossians 2:11).

There is the solemn reminder that the allowance of the flesh in the believer will lead to governmental judgment even to cutting off from God's people.

Sarah is blessed with Abraham and is ennobled with i change of name. In the presence of these communications Abraham is filled with joy: for, doubtless, in this passage the laughter speaks of joy, not unbelief.

Pleading With God (Genesis 17:18-21)

Abraham pleads for Ishmael, and God hears his prayer. Nevertheless, twice over Abraham is reminded that the covenant is established in Abraham's promised son who is to be called Isaac. From Romans 9:6-9, it would seem that Ishmael sets Forth the unbelieving mass of Israel. There we read, 'They are not all Israel, which are of Israel: neither because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called." The unbelieving mass of the nation are children of Abraham according to the flesh; but only the believing remnant are the true seed according to promise. Nevertheless, even the children according to the flesh would be great upon the earth.

Keeping the Covenant With God (Genesis 17:22-27)

Having finished this great communication God left off talking with Abraham. The self-same day Abraham is careful to keep the covenant by performing the rite of circumcision. He puts into practice the word that he had heard, and acts consistently with the revelation that God has made of Himself.

* * * * * * * Lord! be it soon! Thou know’st our heart, In this sad world, no rest Can find nor wish but where Thou art: That rest itself possessed!

Soon shall we see Thee as Thou art:

O hope for ever blessed !

Thou’lt call us, in our heavenly part — The Father’s house to rest.

O rest! ineffable, divine, The rest of God above: Where Thou forever shalt be mine; My joy, eternal love! His counsels, all fulfilled in Thee; His work of love, complete: — And heavenly hosts shall rest, to see Earth blest beneath Thy feet.

— J.N.D.

God’s Almighty arms are round me, Peace, peace is mine!

Judgment scenes need not confound me, Peace, peace is mine!

Jesus came Himself and sought me;

Sold to death He found and bought me;

Then my blessed freedom taught me, Peace, peace is mine!

While I hear life’s surging billows, Peace, peace is mine!

Why suspend my harp on willows?

Peace, peace is mine!

I may sing with Christ beside me, Though a thousand ills betide me;

Safely He hath sworn to guide me!

Peace, peace is mine!

Every trial draws Him nearer, Peace, peace is mine!

All His strokes but make Him dearer, Peace, peace is mine!

Bless I then the hand that smiteth, Gently and to heal delighteth, ’Tis against my sins He fighteth, Peace, peace is mine!

Welcome every rising sunlight, Peace, peace is mine!

Nearer home each rolling midnight, Peace, peace is mine!

Death and hell cannot appall me, Safe in Christ whate’er befall me, Calmly wait I till He call me, Peace, peace is mine!

Jesus, the Lord, our righteousness! Our beauty Thou, our glorious dress!

Before the throne in this arrayed, With joy shall we lift up the head.

Bold shall we stand in that great day, For who ought to our charge shall lay, While by Thy blood absolved we are From sin and guilt, and shame and fear?

Thus Abraham, the Friend of God, Thus all the saints redeemed with blood, Saviour of sinners Thee proclaim, And all their boast is in Thy name. This spotless robe, the same appears In new creation’s endless years; No age can catch its glorious hue, The robe of Christ is ever new Till we behold Thee on the throne In Thee we boast, in Thee alone Our beauty this, our glorious dress, "Jesus, the Lord, our righteousness."

Blessings and Privileges

Genesis 18:1-33 In Genesis 17:1-27 we learned how God revealed Himself to Abraham as the Almighty — the One who can and will fulfil His promises of blessing in spite of every difficulty. In the light of this revelation Abraham is to walk before God and be perfect, having no confidence in the flesh. In Genesis 18:1-33 we are permitted to see the blessings and privileges of one whose walk is consistent with the revelation of God as the Almighty. The chapter unfolds four great privileges that such an one can enjoy. First he has the personal manifestation of the LORD to him (Genesis 18:1-8). Secondly, he has the assurance of the coming blessing through the promised heir (Genesis 18:9-15). Thirdly, he is treated as a friend to whom God confides what He is about to do (Genesis 18:16-21). Fourthly, in confidence and nearness to God he can intercede on behalf of others (Genesis 18:22-33).

Divine Visitation (Genesis 18:1-7) The first great privilege that the believer enjoys, who walks before God in the light of the revelation that God has given of Himself, and who has no confidence in the flesh, is the personal manifestation of the LORD. The chapter opens with Abraham sitting at his tent door. As a stranger with his tent he is at rest outside the strife of this world. Is there not a danger, in this our day, of believers being distracted and excited by over-occupation with the events taking place in the world? Would that we knew more of the rest of spirit that is the outcome of answering to the call of God and taking the outside place in confidence in God and having no confidence in the flesh! To such an one God comes, as in the case of Abraham, to commune in the most intimate way. The manner of His coming is striking. Abraham looks up and sees that "three men stood by him." As the story develops we learn that two were angels who in due course appear as such in the gate of Sodom (Genesis 19:1). The other, we know, was none less than the LORD, Himself, appearing in human form, a foreshadowing of the time when the Son of God becomes Incarnate and dwells among the children of men.

Divine Ministry (Genesis 18:6-8)

Apparently there was no outward token by which Abraham, or others, could have discerned the presence of Jehovah. All that the world would have seen were three men appearing at his tent door. Abraham, with the spiritual discernment of a man of faith walking in nearness to God, distinguishes the LORD from the two angels, and in reverence bows himself to the ground and addresses Him personally, for he says, "Lord, if now I have found favour in Thy sight, pass not away, I pray Thee, from Thy servant." He asks to be allowed to wash their feet, and invites them to rest under the shadow of the tree while he sets refreshment before them.

Abraham is permitted to do as he had said. A meal is prepared and set before them, "and he stood by them under the tree, and they did eat." Today, if walking in the yet deeper knowledge of God

revealed as Father, is it not possible for believers to enjoy this sweet and intimate fellowship with Divine Persons. Not, indeed, in the particular manner in which the LORD appeared to Abraham: but, by the Spirit, Who has come from the Father, can we be led into the most blessed communion. Little, indeed we may know of it, but, nonetheless it can be known. On that last night, in the Upper Room, the Lord intimates that when He left the disciples it would still be possible for them to enjoy in the power of the Spirit, an intimacy far deeper than any they had known while the Lord was present with them. Having spoken of the Spirit that the Father would send, He says, "At that day," the day in which we live, "he that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him," and again the Lord adds, "If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him and We will come unto Him, and make Our abode with him" (John 14:16-25).

Here, too, for the first time we have the mention of feet washing in Scripture. Here as elsewhere the thought of feet washing is to refresh the one whose feet are washed. Abraham has the high privilege of washing the feet of the One who, in the years to come, will become flesh and, in the greatness of the love that delights to serve others will, in His condescending grace, wash His poor disciples' feet.

Divine Communication (Genesis 17:9-15) The Lord takes this occasion by this moment of holy intimacy to confirm the faith of Abraham by assuring him of the coming birth of his son. This concerns Sarah, 50 the LORD asks, "Where is Sarah thy wife?" Then the LORD says, "I will certainly return unto thee at this time of the year; and lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son" (N. Tr.). For any but a Divine Person to have spoken thus would have been mere presumption. We cannot count upon a day. God can say, "I will certainly return." Thus the faith of Abraham is confirmed by the assurance of the LORD'S own words. And still the Lord delights to assure our trembling hearts with the certain word of the One who can say, "I will." "I will come again, and receive you unto Myself." "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (John 14:3-18).

Abraham hears this great promise with the full realization of the glory of the One who speaks, and therefore expresses no astonishment, raises no difficulties, and expresses no doubt. In marked contrast Sarah's faith and discernment is not equal to her husband's She hears what is said, but has little realization of the glory of the Speaker. She doubts what is said because of what she finds in herself. She is old and her body worn out, therefore she argues that what the Lord has said cannot come true, and in her heart she laughs in unbelief at the very suggestion of having a son. She is rebuked for her unbelief and Abraham is reminded that, however impossible the fulfilment of the promise on the ground of nature, there is nothing too hard for the Lord.

Charged with her unbelief, Sarah is ashamed to own the truth. As so often, fear of consequences leads to lying and deceit. She "denied, saying, I laughed not." It may have been true that she did not laugh aloud; but she laughed in her heart and has to learn that she is in the presence of One who can read the heart and see behind tent doors.

Divine Prophecy (Genesis 17:16-20)

Very blessedly, in the years to come, God speaks through the prophet Isaiah of Abraham as "My friend" (Isaiah 41:8). In this scene we see God treating Abraham as a friend. Truly, as it has often

been said, to a servant we speak of things that concern his work, to a friend we speak of that which we may be about to do, though it may have no direct concern with our friend. Here then Abraham is treated as a friend, for God says, "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" The reason that God treats him as a friend is very blessed, for, the Lord says, "I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment." The one that the Lord treats as a friend is not only one that believes in the Lord, but also orders his household in the fear of the Lord. To us the word of the Lord is, "Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you"; and He adds, 'Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you" (John 15:15).

Treating Abraham as a friend the Lord tells him of the judgment that He is about to bring upon the cities of the plain. But let us remember that these communications come to the man who, as we have seen, lives apart from the world, has renounced the world, and gained the victory over the world. Unless we escape the corruptions of the world we shall be saying with the mere professor, "Where is the promise of His coming?" The Apostle Peter warns us not to be in ignorance of the solemn fact that the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night bringing judgment upon an ungodly world.

Already we have learned that "the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly" (Genesis 13:13). Now we learn that their sin cried out to the Lord for judgment, for it was "very grievous." God waits and bears long with the wickedness of men, but He is not indifferent to sin. It cries out to Him until at last it is ripe for judgment. But, even so, the Lord is slow to judge. First we read of the two angels, that they "rose up from thence, and looked toward Sodom" (Genesis 18:16); then they "went toward Sodom" (Genesis 18:22); finally, we read, "there came two angels to Sodom at even" (Genesis 19:1).

Intercession (Genesis 18:22-33)

Two angels have passed on to execute the judgment of the Lord on the doomed cities. Abraham is left alone standing before the Lord. At once he takes the place of the intercessor. He intercedes on the ground that it is impossible to destroy the righteous with the wicked. Therefore he pleads with God to spare the city if there are found therein fifty righteous men. Then he pleads for it to be saved if there are forty-five righteous men; then he comes down to forty, thirty, twenty, and at last he pleads if there be only ten men. Each time God, in His grace, grants his request; until, at last, it is Abraham's faith fails to draw upon that grace of God that, where sin abounds, grace does much more abound. At a later date God could say to Jeremiah of the doomed city of Jerusalem, If you can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it" (Jeremiah 5:1). We know that Man has been found: Christ is the "One mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus who gave Himself a ransom for all." Through this Man we are bidden to intercede for all men (1 Timothy 2:1-6).

What is the garish world to me — Its tinsel and its joys?

Thy glory and Thy grace I see, My soul is satisfied with Thee, And earth no more annoys.

Thou hast the Father's name declared, The Father's love hast shown; And I Thy heavenly voice have heard, Thy powerful life-imparting word My inmost soul hath known.

Thou art my shelter, loving Lord, The bread on which I feed, My rock with living water stored —

Forever be Thy name adored, My soul can know no need.

Yea. Thou art everything to me, Star of the morning bright;

Thy love declared in death I see, Thy glory and Thy victory In resurrection light.

Love not the world: its smiles, its hopes May lure thee on; But cup of joy, and dream of bliss, Will soon be gone.

Those dreams will fade, as mist in morn;

Those hopes will die; And in that cup of seeming joy, Deep sorrows lie.

Love not the world: it, with its lusts,

Must pass away; Its pleasures sweet, its hopes so bright,

Must all decay. Its glories, too, must have an end, Must pale and die, And all its empty bubbles burst;

They’re Satan’s lie. But he who does the will of God, For aye will live, And drink the streams of heaven’s delights, Which Christ will give.

He’ll weep no more on that blest shore; No marvel this, For joys well up, and fill his cup, There’s naught but bliss.

Dear fellow-pilgrim in the path, Look up! look on!

There waits above, a home of love, Where Christ is gone. And pleasures bright in courts of light Will satisfy A heart at rest, supremely blest, With Jesus nigh.

Friendship With the World

Genesis 19:1-38 In Genesis 18:1-33 we have seen the blessings of a believer whose walk is consistent with the revelation of God as the Almighty. In Genesis 19:1-38 there comes before us the sorrows of a believer who has given up the separate path, and walks in association with a judgment-doomed world. We shall see, indeed, that he is saved, but so as by fire, and passes out of the story under a cloud leaving behind him the memory of a life of shame. A Striking Contrast The opening verses of these two chapters evidently set Abraham and Lot in striking contrast. In Genesis 18:1, Abraham comes before us as sitting in his tent door. In Genesis 19:1, Lot is seen sitting "in the gate of Sodom." One believer is outside the world in his true pilgrim character, with his tent; the other is, not only in the world, but, he is actually taking part in its administration; he sits in the gate — the place of judgment. The End of a Downward Path

Once Lot was in the outside place, that answers to the call of God — but there only as a follower of others. A little trouble arises and at once he gives up the path of faith and separation, and chooses the well-watered plain, and "pitched his tent toward Sodom" (Genesis 13:12). Next we learn that he "dwelt in Sodom" (Genesis 14:12). Now, at last, we read, "Lot sat in the gate of Sodom." But the city in which Lot has an honoured place as a magistrate, is a judgment-doomed city, and the time has come when the city is ripe for judgment. From the Lord’s own words, in Luke 17:1-37, we

know that this solemn scene is a foreshadowing of the judgment about to fall on this present evil world. There we read, "As it was in the days of Lot . . . thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed" (Luke 17:28-33).

We are living in the days just before the Son of Man is about to be revealed, and we are warned by the Lord Himself, that in these our days we shall find a terrible condition similar to that which existed in the days of Lot. This makes this chapter of immense practical importance, as presenting the true character of the world around us, and, above all, as setting forth conditions so hateful to God that at length He has to intervene in judgment. The Breakdown of Testimony

What then were the conditions in Sodom that brought down the judgment of God? Two things characterized the city. First, the men of Sodom were "wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly" (Genesis 13:13). Secondly, a true believer was holding a place of honour in the city, associated with sinners in seeking to judge and maintain order in the world. It was then a city characterized by the association of sinners before the Lord with believers in the Lord. It is this condition, so hateful to God, that marks the world of today, and that will very soon bring the present period of grace to a close. It is not simply the wickedness of the world that ends the day of grace. The wickedness of the world may show itself in different forms at different times, but it cannot be greater today than when it perpetrated the crowning sin of crucifying the Lord of glory. It is rather the breakdown of the Christian profession whereby even true believers are found in the world, not as witnesses to the grace of God, but in closest association with the world, that God will lot tolerate and that makes the judgment so imminent. When those who were left to be a witness to the grace of God settle down in the world and cease to be any witness for God, the end is not far off. The Message of Warning

We have the warning challenge of the apostle in clear and unmistakable words, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: and what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness: and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?" (2 Corinthians 6:14-15). In spite of these plain words, what do we see on every hand today? Not only a world filled with violence and corruption — this has ever been — but, on every hand we see true believers, in flagrant disregard of the Word of God, associated with unbelievers and those who mock at divine things. It has been truly said, "Evangelical leaders even, can now take their places openly on public platforms with Unitarians and sceptics of almost every grade; and societies, secret or public, can link together all possible beliefs in the most hearty good fellowship. It is this that marks the time as so near the limit of divine long-suffering, that the very people who are orthodox as to Christ can nevertheless be so easily content to leave Him aside on any utilitarian plea by which they may have fellowship with His rejectors." When those who profess to be ministers of Christianity cease to be witnesses for Christ and, sinking down to the level of the world, become themselves the leaders in all worldliness, then, indeed the salt has lost its savour, and the Christian profession, having become nauseous to Christ will be spued out of His mouth and the judgment will fall upon the world.

Surely, then, the destruction of Sodom should speak to every conscience, and lead us to take heed to that word which says, "Come out of her my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" (Revelation 18:4). The Ministry of Angels

There are, moreover, other lessons for us to learn from this solemn scene. In the preceding chapter the LORD appeared to Abraham accompanied by two angels. Here it is only the angels that come to Sodom. Abraham, in the outside place with his tent, enjoys sweet communion with the LORD. Lot, sitting in the gate of Sodom, will have no visits from the LORD. His soul may be vexed with the filthy conversation, and unlawful deeds of the wicked, but he will enjoy no communion with the LORD.

Furthermore, while the LORD came to Abraham in the full light of day, the two angels come to Sodom "at even." They come, not to give a public witness to Sodom, but, as it were, in the secrecy of the evening gloom to pull a falling saint out of the fire of judgment (Genesis 18:1; Genesis 19:1).

We may gather from Scripture that the service of angels has a twofold character. On the one hand they are the executors of judgment; on the other hand they are "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation" (Psalms 104:4; Hebrews 1:14). We see them in this twofold service at Sodom. In judgment they had come to destroy the city: providentially, they were there to rescue a true believer from a false position! Good to know that, in our day, though judgment is about to fall on Christendom, every true believer will be saved From judgment, even though, with many, it may be like Lot, their works destroyed but they themselves saved yet so "as through the fire'' (1 Corinthians 3:15, N.Tr.).

Lot’s Inconsistency

Further we see that Lot, being a true believer, recognizes the heavenly visitors, treats them with due reverence, seeks to honour them, and shelter them from the insults of the men of the world. Alas! only to find that he as no power to restrain their wickedness. In his extremity he is even prepared to sink to the vile expedient of abandoning his two daughters to their lust in order to quell the disturbance. His efforts only arouse the anger of the men of Sodom. They tell him to "stand back." They argue that this man, who came into their midst as an alien, now takes upon himself to act as their judge. With these threatening words they press sore upon Lot who is only saved from the violence of the mob by the providential action of the angels.

Lot’s Failure The angels’ directions to Lot to warn his relatives that the LORD is about to destroy the city, brings to light the solemn fact that the believer in a false position has no power in testimony. Lot "went out and spake to his sons in law," warning them of the coming judgment. "But he seemed as one that mocked." It was indeed a witness to the truth, but it condemned himself. Had he not professed to be a righteous man, and yet had he not been so attracted to Sodom that he had chosen to dwell there, and even take a leading part in its affairs? Did he then really believe that the LORD was about to destroy the city? His whole life was a flat contradiction to his testimony. Little wonder that he seemed as one that mocked to the men of Sodom. Nor is it otherwise today. Can we wonder that the world pays little heed to any warnings uttered by the professed ministers of religion who themselves are leaders in worldliness.

Lot’s Hesitation

Even while warning others, Lot is loath to leave Sodom; for when urged to haste from the doomed city, we read "he lingered." Nevertheless, the mercy of the LORD "brought him forth and set him without the city." His wife and two daughters are brought out with him but all his possessions are left behind. He is saved so as through the fire.

Delivered by the mercy of God he is told to "escape to the mountain." He admits the mercy that has saved him, but he has little faith in the preserving care of the One that directs him to the mountain. Moved by fear and unbelief, he pleads that the little city of Zoar may be spared for a place of refuge. His prayer is granted; and as the sun rises Lot enters Zoar.

How solemn are these words, "The sun was risen." It speaks of a cloudless day with no sign of the coming judgment. As the Lord tells us of the men of Sodom, "they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded." All went on as usual, "But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all." The Lord adds the solemn words, "Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed" (Luke 17:28-30). So, at a later day, the Apostle can write "that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape" (1 Thessalonians 5:2-3).

Lot’s Wife

Lot’s wife looked back. Lot personally was a righteous man, though caught in the toils of the world. His wife was a mere professor who, though she leaves the city, has her heart still there. She looks back to the place of her affections and becomes an everlasting warning to professors who, in a moment of fear may separate from the world, but have never known the call of the LORD. How solemn are the Lord’s own words, "Remember Lot’s wife" (Luke 17:32). In contrast to Lot, saved through fire, and his wife who looked back, we have a glimpse of the separate man who looked on to the city which hath foundations. Abraham was in "the place where he stood before the LORD." He sees from afar the destruction of the cities of the plain. Then we learn what is so highly instructive, that if Lot is saved from the overthrow of the cities it is because "God remembered Abraham." Lot, as he sat in the gate of Sodom, might have said, "What good is Abraham to the world dwelling apart in his tent?" Yet it is of Abraham, in the separate path, that God had said, ’’Thou shalt be a blessing." So it came to pass; for if Lot is saved it is because God remembered Abraham.

Lot’s Fear

Though saved from the doom of Sodom, poor Lot is still the victim of fear. The very city of his choice he ears to dwell in, so he falls back on the mountain to which he had been told to flee. But even so, he goes to he mountain driven by fear of men rather than led by faith in God. There he becomes involved in the infamy of his daughters to pass from the history with no record of his end, leaving behind a posterity that becomes the constant enemy of God’s people.

How solemn and searching to all our hearts is this history of a believer who, though once in the path of separation from the world gave it up to sink into association with the world, there to find that he could have no communion with God; no power to restrain the evil of the world; no power to witness to the truth, and no confidence in the preserving care of God: finally to pass from the scene under the dark shadow of great shame. Well indeed, if the story leads us to feel our own weakness, and casts us upon the One Who is able to keep us from falling and present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.

Farewell to this world’s fleeting joys, Our home is not below;

There was no home for Jesus here, And ’tis to Him we go. To Him in yonder world of love, Where He has gone before: The home He changed for Calvary’s cross, Where all our sins He bore He bore our sins that we might be His partners on the throne! The throne He’ll shortly share with those For whom He did atone Up to our Father’s house we go, To that sweet home of love:

Many the mansions that are found Where Jesus dwells above And He who left that home above, To be a sufferer here, Has left this world again for us A mansion to prepare. His errand to the earth was love, To wretches such as we! To pluck us from the jaws of death, Nailed to th’accursed tree.

Th’accursed tree was the reward Which this sad world did give To Him who gave His precious life That this lost world might live. And has this world a charm for us, Where Jesus suffered thus?

No! we have died to all its charms Through Jesus’ wondrous cross. The cross on which our Saviour died Has won the crown for us! In thankful fellowship with Him We bear our daily cross.

Set free in grace — He vanquished him Who held us in his chains — But more than this, He shares with us The fruit of all His pains. To all His ransomed ones He’ll give (To us amongst the rest): With Him to dwell, with Him to reign, With Him forever blest Farewell, farewell, poor faithless world, With all thy boasted store;

We’d not have joy where He had woe — Be rich where He was poor. The mists hang dank, on front and flank, My straining eye can naught discover; But well I know that many a foe Around that path doth hover. Nor this alone would make me groan —

Alas, a traitor dwells within me; With hollow smile and heart of guile, The world without, too, plots to win me.

Thus I’m beset with foes, and yet I would not miss a single danger:

Each foe’s a friend that makes me wend My homeward way — on earth a stranger. For never haze dims upward gaze —

Oh, glorious sight! for there above me Upon God’s throne there sitteth One Who died to save — who lives to love me! And like the dew each dayspring new That tender love shall onward lead me: My thirst doth slake, yet thirst awake Till every breath shall pant, "I need Thee." No wisdom give; I’d rather live In conscious lack dependent on Thee:

Each parting way I meet this aye Then proves my claim to call upon Thee. No strength I ask, for Thine the task To bear Thine own on Shepherd-shoulder Then faith may boast when helpless most, And greater need makes weakness bolder.

Then, Lord, Thy breast is, too, my rest; And there, as in my home, I’m hidden, Where quiet peace makes groanings cease, And Zion’s songs gush forth unbidden.

Yes, e’en on earth may song have birth, And music rise o’er nature’s groanings, Whilst Hope new born each springing morn Dispel with joy my faithless meanings. — F.C.J. The Works of the Flesh

Genesis 20:1-18 In Genesis 19:1-38 we have seen Abraham in the high places ’where he stood before the LORD," outside the world and preserved from the hour of trial that came upon them that dwelt upon the earth. An Old Repeated Sin In Genesis 20:1-18 Abraham is once again journeying

toward the south country, and dwelling upon the border land of Egypt. In this doubtful position he again acts in a way that brings him under the rebuke from the man of the world.

Abraham fails in the same way that he had done some twenty years before, though the circumstances are somewhat different. Then, under the stress of famine, he had turned aside from the land and slipped into Egypt. Here, without any such trying circumstances, but simply from the fear of man, he denies the one through whom God had definitely assured him the promised heir would come (Genesis 18:10). In one case he gives up the testimony of the inheritance; in the other he beclouds the testimony to the heir. As then, so now, behind every failure of the people of God, the enemy is attacking some great truth connected with their calling. Today, he is specially attacking the truth as to the true relationship of the Church to her Head in Heaven. The fact that after so many years Abraham should fail in the same way, only aggravates the offence. For now it is no mere novice in the path of faith, but one who has walked long in the outside place of separation from the world who breaks down.

Another great lesson that we can learn from this sad episode is that the flesh in God’s people never changes. This is a solemn truth that we are slow to realize, but that we all have to learn, and at times through bitter experience. There is, indeed, grace to deliver us from the power of the flesh, and to keep us from its evil; but the evil flesh from which we are kept never changes. The flesh may tend to show itself in different forms in different individuals; but, whatever form its evil may take, that is the form of evil it will retain from the beginning of our history to the end. This twice repeated failure on the part of this man of God is surely recounted, not to discourage us, or turn us back on our weakness, but, rather, to cast us upon the true source of all confidence and strength. One has truly said, it is only when we have learned that we are "unable to do without God for a moment that we find that He is for us moment by moment." But it is easy to say that we cannot do without God; it is a harder thing-to learn experimentally, perhaps by repeated failure, that we are dependent upon God moment by moment. With the fear of man before him, Abraham loses faith in God. Failing in faith, he falls back on his own resources and acts in the duplicity of the flesh. He says of Sarah, his wife, "She is my sister." He tells the truth to hide the truth, and again exposes his wife to shame to preserve his own life. A God Ever Faithful

Nevertheless, however great their failure, God does not give up His people. He will never cast away His pearls because of some grit that attaches to them. He will deal with all in us that is contrary to Himself — it may be at painful cost to ourselves — in order to make us partakers of His holiness. And not only does God deal with, but He acts for His poor failing people. So in this scene God intervenes in a marked way to preserve Sarah from the shame to which Abraham’s duplicity had exposed her. Abimelech is kept from wronging Abraham, and is even warned that Abraham is a prophet, and that unless Sarah is at once restored to Abraham, death will surely come upon his household. Further, Abimelech is told that the very man who had so wronged him, is one who is in such a position of nearness to God that he can pray for him. In spite of his failure, he is a prophet and an intercessor with God: and God does not deny these high privileges because of his failures. A Rebuke Justified

Nevertheless, the privileges of being a prophet and an intercessor, only increase the evil of his duplicity. This the world is not slow to appreciate; for at once Abimelech calls Abraham, and challenges him as to what he has done. In plain language Abimelech truly says, "Thou hast done

deeds unto me that ought not to be done." Not only had Abraham failed in faith in God, not only had he wronged his wife, but he had wronged the man of the world. Abraham had sunk, not only beneath the height of his calling, but beneath the conduct of a decent man of the world.

Further, Abimelech challenges Abraham as to what led him to do this thing. Abraham answers, "I thought, surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will kill me for my wife's sake." How low this man of God has fallen. Carried away by his own thoughts, thinking only of himself and his safety, he acts with a duplicity that clearly shows that at that moment he himself had not the fear of God before him, however much he may charge others with the lack of the fear of God. A Lame Excuse

Moreover, as so often when a believer fails there is the effort to palliate the failure, instead of the honest confession, "I have sinned." No three words in human language are so hard for either a sinner or a saint to utter as the words, "I have sinned." So Abraham seeks to excuse his duplicity by explaining that it was quite true that Sarah was his sister, even though he had held back the truth that she was also his wife. An Unjudged Root of Unbelief

Moreover, it comes out that this failure has an unjudged root of unbelief far back in his history. In a false position he lowers the testimony of God to the apprehension of the world, by saying, "When God caused me to wander from my father's house." He does not say, "When God called me to a heavenly country and a city which hath foundations," but he would give the impression that, like any mere prodigal, God had caused him to wander from his father's house. In these circumstances he and his wife had entered into a compact of unbelieving duplicity. A Conduct Unbecoming In spite of Abraham's failure, Abimelech, man of the world though he is, acts in a righteous and even liberal way that is in striking contrast to Abraham's conduct. In the day of power and victory over the enemy Abraham refused to take "from a thread even to a shoe latchet" from the king of Sodom. In the day of weakness and unbelief he will accept sheep, and oxen, and menservants, womenservants, and a thousand pieces of silver, from the king of Gerar.

Nevertheless, though giving gifts to Abraham, Abimelech does not hesitate to reprove his wife in terms of contempt, for he says, "Behold, I have given thy brother a thousand pieces of silver: behold, he is to thee a covering of the eyes." Had she been rightly veiled, as Abraham's wife, she never would have been seen by Abimelech or taken into his house. The veil speaks of the women being exclusively for the one to whom she belongs. As believers, if it were seen that we were exclusively for Christ, the world would not wish to have us in its company. Paul could say, "For me to live is Christ;" and, as a result the world was crucified to him, and he was crucified to the world. Failing to maintain this single-hearted devotedness to Christ, we shall, like Sarah, lose the respect of the world and come under its just reproof. The root of their failure being exposed, Abraham once again resumes his true place in reference to the world as an intercessor (Genesis 20:17-18).

God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform;

He plants His footsteps in the sea, And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines. Of never-failing skill, He treasures up His bright designs, And works His sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take, The clouds ye so much dread Are big with mercy, and will break In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, But trust Him for His grace:

Behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face. His purposes will ripen fast, Unfolding every hour; The bud may have a bitter taste, But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err, And scan His work in vain;

God is His own interpreter, And He will make it plain The Birth of the Heir

Genesis 21:1-34 In Genesis 17:1-27 and Genesis 18:1-33 God has been revealed as the Almighty — the One who carries out His promises in spite of the weakness of His people and the wickedness of the world. In Genesis 19:1-38 the evil of the world is fully demonstrated; while, in Genesis 20:1-18 the evil of the flesh and the weakness of God's people are manifested. The world and the flesh having been exposed, we learn in Genesis 21:1-34 that God's set time has come and the long promised heir is born (Genesis 21:1-7); the bondwoman and her child are cast out (Genesis 21:8-21); and the world has to own that God is with the man of faith (Genesis 21:22-34). The Birth of Isaac (Genesis 21:1-5)

Everything on man's side having broken down, we learn that the "set time of which God had spoken" has come and the promised heir is born. He is called Isaac, meaning "laughter," and in due time circumcised in accordance with the directions and commands of the Lord. Everything takes place in God's set time," and according to God's Word. In the birth of Isaac we have a striking type of Christ, of Whom we read, "When the fulness of the time was come God sent forth His Son" (Galatians 4:4). Christ is the One through whom all the blessings promised to Abraham are secured, whether for Israel, the direct seed, or for the Gentile nations. The Effect of That Birth (Genesis 22:6-9) In the two incidents that follow we see the effect of the birth of the heir. In the one scene there are those who rejoice; in the other there are those who mock. Again, do not these two incidents strikingly bring before us the twofold effect of the birth of Christ? Sarah said, "God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me." Time was when her laughter was the expression of her unbelief; now it is the overflow of the joy of her heart. Moreover, her faith recognizes, and owns, that the birth of the son is so wholly of God, and lies so entirely outside the thoughts of man, that she asks, "Who would have said unto Abraham, that Sarah should have given children suck?" So impossible was this to nature, that no man would have said it. Only God would have said it; and only One who is Almighty could carry out what He said. So when at last the Christ of God became Incarnate there were those who, in harmony with heaven, recognized the intervention of God and could rejoice over the birth of the long promised heir. With joy Mary delights to own, "He that is mighty hath done to me great things." Zacharias sees that God hath visited His people, "To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant; the oath which He swore to our father Abraham" — these and all "that looked for redemption in Jerusalem" (Luke 1:49, Luke 1:68-73). But if there were those who rejoiced at the birth of Isaac, there were also those who mocked, and we see what calls forth their enmity. There came a day when "a great feast" is made in honour of the heir. This honour put upon the heir arouses the jealousy and enmity of those who had long held a position in the household of Abraham. So in the history of our Lord, it was the recognition of His supreme and unrivalled place

that drew forth the jealousy and enmity of religious flesh. The wise men from he East worship Him as the King of the Jews and immediately all Jerusalem is troubled, and Herod, the false king, seeks to kill the holy child. The Lesson for Us (Genesis 21:10)

There are, however, other lessons for us in this deeply instructive scene. In the Epistle to the Galatians the apostle quotes the words uttered by Sarah to Abraham, "Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac." In this passage the apostle uses Isaac, not as representative of Christ, but of believers — those who are the subjects of sovereign grace. He says, "We, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise." Moreover, as he uses Isaac to set forth all that we are as born of the Spirit, go he uses Ishmael to set forth our old man — all that we are as born after the flesh. He shows, too, that the man that is after the flesh is entirely opposed to the man that is after the Spirit. "As then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now" (Galatians 4:28-31). The True Character of the Flesh (Genesis 17:11-12)

Even as the coming of Christ into the world exposed all that man is after the flesh, and awakened the enmity of the flesh, so, in the history of our own souls, the more Christ has His true place in our affections, the more we discover the true character of the flesh that is still in us. if we make Christ a feast — if we give Him His true place in our hearts, we discover there is present with us that old man that ever seeks to intrude and exalt self. This raises the great question, Am I going to spare the flesh by gratifying, indulging and exalting self, or am I going to refuse the flesh that Christ may have the supreme place in my life? The Corinthian believers were indulging the flesh in a worldly form; the Colossian saints were in danger of ministering to the flesh by religious ritual; while the Galatian assemblies were giving place to the flesh by legality. They were putting themselves under law as a rule of life. But so far from producing a Christlike life they only developed the fleshly life with its vain glory, and envy, and strife. So the apostle says, "Cast out the bondwoman and her son." We are to refuse the law as a rule of life and the flesh which it stirs up. It is not that the believer slights the law, or is indifferent to its moral requirements. Far from this; but he is to refuse to put himself under the principle of law. Christ hath made us free from the law as a means of obtaining blessing; and we are to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, looking to Him to keep us moment by moment. How truly this was the experience of the Apostle Paul. Christ had the supreme place in his affections, for he could say, "For to me to live is Christ." The result was he refused his own righteousness which was of the law, and had no confidence in the flesh (Php 1:21; Php 3:3). He cast out the bondwoman and her son. To refuse the flesh will call for self-denial, and this involves suffering. So to cast out the bondwoman was "grievous in Abraham’s sight." He is reminded, however, that all blessing is connected with Isaac. To deny oneself and follow Christ will entail a cross — or suffering, but it will lead to great blessing in association with Christ. The Picture of Israel

Hagar and Ishmael as wanderers in the wilderness, with he water spent, may set forth typically the present position of Israel, as a result of seeking to obtain the blessing under law, and so rejecting Christ the promised seed. The earthly people of God are cast out of their land and have become wanderers in the world. Yet, as cast out of the and, Israel is still the object of God’s providential care even as God provided for Hagar and her son. The Testimony of the World (Genesis 21:22-24) In the closing scene of the chapter the man of the world owns that God is with the man of faith that walks in separation from the world. Time was when the man of faith slipped, and acting

in unbelief, came under the reproof of Abimelech. Now the promised heir has come and is given his rightful place by Abraham, and the bondwoman and her son have been cast out. What is of God is owned as supreme and all that is of the flesh has been refused, with the result that Abimelech has to acknowledge, "God is with thee in all that thou doest." Instead of reproving Abraham, as in former lays, he is reproved by Abraham. Nor is it otherwise today.

If Christ has His true place in our lives, if we refuse the flesh, and by faith walk in true separation from the world, the result will be that the very world will see and admit that God is with us. The True Character of the World (Genesis 19:1-38)

Nevertheless, while the world may have to admit that God is with His people who walk in separation, nonetheless, it will seek to deprive the people of God of their means of spiritual refreshment. It will seek to stop our wells. Like Abraham, we may well resist the world's efforts and reprove the world; but, like Abraham, let us seek to mingle with our reproofs the spirit of grace that seeks to impart to the world something of our blessing as represented by the seven ewe lambs. The closing verses would appear to present the climax of Abraham's spiritual history. We have seen that the world has to acknowledge that God is with him; now we see that Abraham is with God. He calls on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God, and he lives as a pilgrim in the land.

God's ways are not like human ways, He wears such strange disguises;

He tires us by His long delays, And then our faith surprises.

While we in unbelief deplore, And wonder at His staying, He stands already at the door, To interrupt our praying.

He takes a leader from the Nile, Where mother hands have laid him;

Hides him in palaces the while, Till He has right arrayed him.

He sends him to the desert's hush, With flocks and herds to wander;

Then meets him in the burning bush, New mysteries to ponder.

Why should we doubt His care and grace, As though He had forgotten? As though time's changes could efface What love had once begotten? As though He'd lost us from His thought And moved on now without us, Whose love has always goodness wrought, And constant been about us?

— J.E.R.

Oh, what a voice was that which once the patriarch Abram heard, "Take now thy son, thine only son, thine Isaac, so endeared, And unto far Moriah's land at once arise and go, Offer him, a burnt offering, there, on a mount that I shall show." That voice he knew and lingered not — his inmost soul obeyed, Counting that God could raise him up, though even from the dead.

He took his son, the fire, the knife, with two at his command;

Three days they journeyed on, until they saw th' appointed land.

Then as they trod the way alone, their converse none might share, The father laid the wood he clave upon the son to bear. The fire, the knife, were Abraham's part, by faith obedient still,

Assured that God who gave the word, would all His word fulfil.

They reached the spot — his son he bound, and on the altar laid;

He took the knife to slay his son, when lo! the hand was stayed; A voice from heaven arrests the stroke — another victim bled. And Abraham received his son as risen from the dead.

Fair picture of a mightier love that gave the Son to die! A holier sacrifice, whose place none other could supply. The two who "both together" went until the work was done Which glorifies forevermore the Eternal Three-in-one.

E.H.C. The Offering Up of Isaac

Genesis 22:1-24

We have seen that the first portion of Abraham’s life presents his public testimony as a man of faith walking in separation from the world, in answer to the call of God (Genesis 12:1-20, Genesis 13:1-18, Genesis 14:1-24). In the second part of his history, commencing with the words, "After these things," we learn the inner exercises of his soul in his personal relationships with God (Genesis 15:1-21, Genesis 16:1-16, Genesis 17:1-27, Genesis 18:1-33, Genesis 19:1-38, Genesis 20:1-18, Genesis 21:1-34). The Last Phase of Abraham’s Life With the twenty-second chapter of Genesis we enter upon the last phase of his life. It also commences with the words, "After these things." In this, and the following chapters, there passes before us certain incidents which, in a very distinct way, set forth in type the ways of God in carrying out His purposes for the glory of Christ and the blessing of man. In Genesis 21:1-34 we have seen in the birth of Isaac at "the set time" a foreshadowing of that great moment of which we read, "when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son made of a woman" (Galatians 4:4). In Genesis 22:1-24 we shall see a type of the death and resurrection of Christ — the Lamb of God’s providing. In Genesis 23:1-20 the death and burial of Sarah sets forth in type the setting aside of Israel, the Genesis bride, in consequence of the rejection of Christ. In Genesis 24:1-67 while Israel is set aside we have the calling out of the Church — the heavenly bride, set forth in Rebekah.

While we seek to profit by the typical aspects of these striking incidents, we must not overlook their moral bearing. If this twenty-second chapter is a marvellous presentation of the love of God in giving the Son, morally it sets forth in a striking way the faith of Abraham. The Supreme Test The moral teaching comes before us in the opening words: "And it came to pass after these things, that God tried Abraham" (N. Tr.). In that great chapter in the Epistle to the Hebrews which presents before us those who have trodden the path of faith, we find that Abraham has an outstanding place. It is not only that he is presented as one who by faith answered to the call of God, but he is highly privileged as having his faith tested beyond that of any man before or since. In the history we read that God said to him, "Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, Isaac, and get thee into the land of Moriah: and offer him there for a burnt offering." The inspired comment in Hebrews is, "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac," the very one in whom all the promises centred, and of whom it was said, "That in Isaac shall thy seed be called." He was told to do that which to sight and natural reason would make the fulfilment of the promises of God impossible. But, we learn, that he acted, not according to mere reason, but, "by faith . . . accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence he received him in a figure." The Act of Obedience When the children of Job were taken from him, he very

blessedly submitted to what God had allowed, for he said, "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away." But Abraham's faith is tried with a much severer test, and rises to a far higher level. He is not simply asked to submit passively to the will of God, but, he is called to take part actively in that which was contrary to nature, anguish to a father's heart, and, apart from God's direction, in outrage against the laws of God and man. But, Abraham, with God-given faith, answers to the test. With calm deliberation, he rises up early in the morning, saddles his ass and taking two young men and Isaac his son, he "went unto the place of which God had told him." For three days he travels on his way. Time and opportunity was thus given to thoroughly enter into what he was called to do. For three days this terrible trial was before his soul. During these days he had to face the agony of offering up his son. It was not an act hurriedly done under some momentary impulse. It was deliberately done after having entered into all that it cost him. His love to his son, the feelings of Isaac and his love to his father, God's promise that "in Isaac shall thy seed be called" — all was fully faced, but faith triumphed. Had unbelief been at work there was time given to turn back. But faith persevered, and on the third day, the place having come in sight, he "said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you." Faith, accounting that God can raise from the dead, can say with the utmost confidence, we will "come again."

We are not tested in the same manner as Abraham, but good for us, when our loved ones are taken, if we can say, "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him." Faith knows that though for a time they are taken from us — and have gone yonder to worship — they will "come again."

Father and Son

Isaac inquires, "Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" In faith Abraham replies, "My son, God will provide Himself a lamb"; and without further word, they pass on "both of them together." Without resistance or complaint, Isaac submits to be bound to the altar, and Abraham "stretched forth his hand to slay his son.

Then the angel of the Lord intervenes. Abraham's hand was withheld from plunging the knife into his son. Abraham's faith has answered to the test and God says, "Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from Me." Acting in the fear of God, he overcame the fear of man in doing that which man would have utterly condemned.

Another Father — Another Son

Viewing this remarkable scene in its typical bearing, there rises up before us the greatness of the love of God in giving His Son to die for us. The word to Abraham is "take now thy son," telling us that God "spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all" (Romans 8:12). Then Abraham is told that he is to take his "only son." Three times in the chapter is it emphasized that Isaac is his "only" son (Genesis 24:2, Genesis 24:12, Genesis 24:16). Again this speaks of the love of God by which "He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16). Further, Abraham is reminded that the son he is to offer up is one "whom thou lovest," speaking to us of the fact that Christ is the One of whom it is said, "The Father loveth the Son" (John 3:35). It is significant that this, the first mention of love in the Bible, is in connection with a scene that speaks of the love of God, the Father, for the Son.

Perfect Obedience

Moreover, if the scene brings before us the love of God in giving the Son, so also it presents the perfect submission and uncomplaining obedience to his father's will. In all this there is the bright foreshadowing of the perfect obedience of Christ to the Father which led Him to say in view of death, "Not My will, but Thine, be done" (Luke 22:42).

Further, during the three days' journey the wood of the burnt offering is borne by Isaac, while the fire and he knife are in the hand of Abraham. Throughout the years of His ministry the Lord bore the knowledge of His coming death. Over every step of His way there was the shadow of the Cross. The crowds may wonder at "all things which Jesus did," but He knew that the won of Man would be delivered into the hands of men Luke 9:44). The apostles may follow Him to Jerusalem with visions of the Kingdom being set up in power, and Christ reigning on a throne of glory, but He knew that He was moving on the shameful Cross.

Nevertheless, if men are allowed to crucify the Lord, the fire and the knife, speaking of judgment and death, were in the hands of God. Men may think that they van crucify, or release the Lord according to their will, But the Lord can say to Pilate, "Thou couldest have no power at all against Me except it were given thee from above" (John 19:11). No eye could pierce the darkness of that great scene when the fire and the knife fell upon Christ. But all that took place then was taken from God's hand, for Christ could say, "Thou hast laid Me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Thy wrath lieth hard upon Me, and Thou hast afflicted Me with all Thy waves" (Psalms 88:6-7).

Perfect Communion

Then there comes a moment when the "young men" are left behind and Abraham and his only son go up alone to the mount. This surely speaks to us of that great moment of which the Lord has to say, "Whither I go thou canst not follow Me now" (John 13:36). And yet the Lord can say, "He that sent Me is with Me: the Father hath not left Me alone" (John 3:29). Thus, of Abraham and Isaac we twice read, "They went both of them together" (Genesis 24:6, Genesis 24:8), speaking to us of the perfect communion of the Father and the Son presented so blessedly in the Gospel of John as the Lord Jesus moved forward to the Cross to become the great burnt offering by which God is perfectly glorified. The Lord could say, "My Father worketh hitherto and I work"; again, He could say, "I seek not Mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent Me." Later He can say, "I do always those things that please Him"; and again, "I and the Father are one" (John 5:17, John 5:30; John 8:29; John 10:30).

Perfect Submission

Arriving at the place, Isaac is perfectly submissive to the one that acts. Abraham builds the altar; Abraham laid the wood in order: Abraham bound Isaac, his son; Abraham laid him upon the altar, and Abraham stretched forth his hand and took the knife to slay his son. So of Christ we read, "He opened not His mouth: He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth . . . Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief" (Isaiah 53:7-10).

Comparison and Contrast

It is significant that in all the offerings the victim was first killed, and then laid upon the altar. Here the offering becomes a more striking type of Christ in that he is first bound to the altar before the

knife is taken to slay him. But every type must fall short of the reality. In the type the angel of the Lord arrests the hand that held the knife, and Isaac is spared. At the Cross no hand was put forth to stay the power of death. The love of the Father spared not the Son, and the love of the Son submitted to the Father's will in going into death. An angel may strengthen the Lord in the Garden, but there was no angel to shelter from judgment at the cross. In a figure, Abraham receives Isaac from the dead (Hebrews 11:19). But if Isaac is to go free, death must come on the ram caught in the thicket — a further type of the Lamb of God's providing. In the course of this wonderful scene Abraham utters the two prophetic statements; first, "God will provide Himself a Lamb for a burnt offering"; secondly, "In the mount of the Lord it shall be provided" (N. Tr.). As the Lord could say, 'Abraham rejoiced to see My day: and he saw it, and was glad" (John 8:56).

God renews His promises to Abraham on the ground of sacrifice, and confirms His promise of blessing to all the nations of the earth through the risen seed. Here we know, from the Epistle to the Galatians, that the seed is Christ, for, says the apostle, "To Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, and to seed, as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed which is Christ" (Galatians 3:16). The genealogy of the closing verses seems purposely given at this point to introduce Rebekah, the one that so blessedly sets forth the heavenly bride of Christ.

O blessed Lord, what hast Thou done!

How vast a ransom paid!

God's only well-beloved Son Upon the altar laid! The Father in His willing love Could spare Thee from His side; And Thou couldst stoop to bear above, At such a cost, Thy bride.

While our full hearts in faith repose Upon Thy precious blood, Peace in a steady current flows, Filled from Thy mercy's flood.

What boundless joy will fill each heart, Our every grief efface, When we behold Thee as Thou art, And all Thy love retrace.

Unseen we love Thee, dear Thy name! But when our eyes behold, With joyful wonder we'll proclaim, "The half hath not been told!" For Thou exceedest all the fame Our ears have ever heard;

How happy we who know Thy name, And trust Thy faithful Word! The Lamb of God to slaughter led, The King of Glory see! The crown of thorns upon His head, They nail Him to the tree! The Father gives His only Son; The Lord of glory dies for us, the guilty and undone, A spotless Sacrifice!

Thy Name is holy, O our God!

Before Thy throne we bow;

Thy bosom is Thy saints' abode, We call Thee Father now!

Enthroned with Thee now sits the Lord, And in Thy bosom dwells;

Justice, that smote Him with the sword, Our perfect pardon seals.

Eternal death was once our doom;

Now death hast lost its sting;

We rose with Jesus from the tomb, Jehovah’s love to sing.

— R. C. C.

I’m a pilgrim and a stranger, Rough and stormy is my road, Often in the midst of danger; But it leads to God.

Clouds and darkness oft distress me:

Great and many are my foes;

Anxious cares and thoughts oppress me: But my Father knows.

Oh, how sweet is this assurance, ’Midst the conflict and the strife!

Although sorrows past endurance, Follow me through life.

Home in prospect still can cheer me;

Yes, and give me sweet repose, While I feel His presence near me: For my Father knows.

Yes, He sees and knows me daily, Watches over me in love;

Sends me help when foes assail me, Bids me look above.

Soon my journey will be ended, Life is drawing to a close;

I shall then be well attended: This my Father knows.

I shall then with joy behold Him, Face to face my Saviour see;

Fall with rapture and adore Him For His love to me.

Nothing more shall then distress me In the land of sweet repose;

Jesus stands engaged to bless me: This my Father knows. The Death of Sarah

Genesis 23:1-20 In the twenty-third chapter we have the record of he death and burial of Sarah. As so often, in these Old Testament histories, the facts related have a typical as well as a moral significance. That this is no fanciful conclusion is clear from the twofold interpretation of these events given to us in the New Testament. An Allegory In the Epistle to the Galatians the apostle gives us the allegorical significance of Hagar and Sarah. Hagar and her son represent the law and those who are seeking blessing under law; while Sarah and her children represent the unconditional promises of God and those who ire blessed in sovereign grace (Galatians 4:21-26). The people of Israel, having put themselves under law, sought to obtain blessing on the ground of their own efforts; the result being they only brought forth the evil works of the flesh, and rejected Christ who was presented to them in grace, and through whom they could have received blessing on the ground of the promises made to Abraham. Peter, addressing the nation after the death and resurrection of Christ, can say, "Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abram, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. 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" (Acts 3:25-26). This offer of grace was rejected by the nation, and as a result, for the time being, God’s earthly people are set aside.

Christ’s Earthly Bride The death of Sarah following upon the offering up of Isaac, would seem to bring before us this setting aside of the nation of Israel, that followed upon their rejection of the grace offered to them on the ground of the death and resurrection of Christ. Sarah, type of Christ’s earthly bride, passes from the story, and Rebekah, type of the heavenly bride, comes into view. A Plain Declaration

Such then would appear to be the typical meaning of the death and burial of Sarah. There is, however, the moral significance of these incidents, so clearly brought before us in the Epistle to the Hebrews. There we learn that these saints of old not only lived by faith but they "all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims in the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country" (Hebrews 11:13-14).

Here, then, we see the faith of Abraham in the presence of death; the confession that he is but a stranger and a pilgrim, and, by his actions, declaring plainly his pilgrim character before the world.

Faith’s Prospect

Abraham’s faith had received Isaac at the word of the Lord, when his own body was as good as dead. His faith had offered up Isaac, at the word of the Lord, accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead. Now, in like faith, he buries Sarah in the sure and certain hope of resurrection. In faith he had ascended Mount Moriah to offer up his son. In like faith he now races the cave of Machpelah to bury his wife. The moment has come when he has to bury his "dead out of sight," but his faith knows that his loved one will come again and have her part in that better, and heavenly, country to which his faith was looking on. The God of Resurrection

God had revealed Himself to Abraham as the Almighty, and as the God of resurrection, and had assured him that the land wherein he was a stranger — all the land of Canaan — was given to him for an everlasting possession (Genesis 17:8). All was his by promise, though not yet in possession. In the faith of God’s promise he was careful to lay the body of Sarah to rest in the Promised Land. In the land of Canaan she had lived with Abraham as a stranger and a pilgrim; "in the land Of Canaan" she had died; and "in the land of Canaan" she was buried (Genesis 24:2, Genesis 24:19). In the same faith, at a later date, the sons of Isaac bury their father at Hebron, in the land of Canaan (Genesis 35:27-29). So, too, in due time, Jacob, though he dies in Egypt, is buried in faith by his sons in the land of Canaan, in the cave of Machpelah (Genesis 50:13). In the like fine faith, Joseph when he came to die, takes an oath of the children of Israel that they shall carry his bones from Egypt to the land of Canaan (Genesis 50:25-26, Exodus 13:19).

Godly Sorrow

If, however, in these scenes we see shining examples of the faith of God’s elect in the presence of death, we also learn that faith does not set aside natural Affection. Thus we read, "Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her" (v. 2). Full well faith knows that our loved ones that die in the Lord will rise again, and that for them death is gain, but nonetheless we rightly mourn and feel their loss. Our sure and certain hope of resurrection tells us indeed, as the apostle reminds us,

that our sorrow is not the sorrow of those who have no hope. But there is no word to say we are not to sorrow. None could know the power of resurrection like the One who is Himself the resurrection and the life, and yet He wept at the grave of Lazarus. A Promise Fulfilled

Furthermore, we see that in the presence of death, Abraham still acts as becomes one that is a stranger and a pilgrim. He confesses before the sons of Heth, "I am a stranger and a sojourner with you." As such he gains the respect of the world, for they say, "Thou art a prince of God among us" (v. 6, N.Tr.). How striking the contrast to poor Lot — the believer who gave up his pilgrim character to dwell in Sodom. Such an one the world treats with well-merited contempt, for in the day of his trouble they say, "Stand back. . . this one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge" (Genesis 19:9). Sixty years before this God had said to Abraham that one result of answering to the call of God, and taking the outside place, would be that God would make his name great (Genesis 12:2). Here we see this word fulfilled, for the very world has to own that this separate man is "a mighty prince of God." Poor Lot who sought to make himself great in the world, as a judge in the gate, has to "stand back" and take a place of contempt in the eyes of the world. A Lowly Mind

Nevertheless, Abraham does not presume upon the high respect in which he is held by the world, in order to exalt himself. He does not speak of his dignities, of his high calling, or of the glories that lie before him. In the days of the Lord, when the careless world would make Him a King, He makes Himself of no reputation and departs into a mountain alone (John 6:15). In like spirit, Abraham refuses to magnify himself. He does not seek that the world should bow to him as a mighty prince, but rather he is marked by the lowly mind, for twice we read, he "bowed himself to the people of the land" (vv. 7-12). A Righteous Character The kindness of the world would press upon Abraham a burying place as a gift. True to his pilgrim character he refuses to take the place of a prince that receives gifts, and is content to be the stranger that pays for his wants. He refused to use the praise of the world to exalt himself, and he will not let the kindness of the world move him from the path of strangership. As before he had refused he gifts of the king of Sodom, so now he declines the gifts of the children of Heth. He buys the burying place, and, as becomes a stranger, in all his dealings with the world, he acts in strict righteousness paying "four hundred shekels of silver, current money with the merchant." In all these ways we see that Abraham in his day was one that called upon the Lord out of a pure heart, and followed righteousness, faith, love, and peace. The Bride Midst the darkness, storm and sorrow, one bright gleam I see:

Well I know the blessed morrow Christ will come for me.

Midst the light and peace and glory of the Father’s home, Christ for me is watching, waiting — waiting till I come.

Long the blessed Guide has led me by the desert road;

Now I see the golden towers — City of my God.

There amidst the love and glory, He is waiting yet; On His hands a name is graven He can ne’er forget.

There amidst the songs of heaven, sweeter to His ear Is the footfall through the desert, ever drawing near.

There, made ready are the mansions, glorious, bright and fair; But the Bride the Father gave Him still is wanting there. Who is this who comes to meet me on the desert way, As the morning star foretelling God's unclouded day?

He it is who came to win me on the cross of shame In His glory well I know Him, evermore the same.

Oh, the blessed joy of meeting, all the desert past!

Oh, the wondrous words of greeting He shall speak at last!

He and I together ent'ring those bright courts above;

He and I together sharing all the Father's love. Where no shade nor stain can enter, nor the gold be dim; In that holiness unsullied I shall walk with Him.

Meet companion then for Jesus, from Him, for Him made;

Glory of God's grace forever there in me displayed.

He who in His hour of sorrow bore the curse alone I who through the lonely desert trod where He had gone.

He and I in that bright glory one deep joy shall share:

Mine, to be forever with Him; His, that I am there. The Call of Rebekah

Genesis 24:1-67 In the offering up of Isaac, recorded in Genesis 22:1-24, we cannot fail to see a striking type of the death and resurrection of Christ. Then, in Genesis 23:1-20, the death and burial of Sarah would typify the setting aside of Israel — God's earthly people — that followed upon their rejection of Christ. In this chapter there is a beautiful picture of the calling out of the Church that takes place during the time lsrael is set aside.

Three Great Truths

We know that after the death and resurrection of Christ, He ascended to glory and took His place at the right hand of God. Then, there followed that great event, he coming of the Holy Spirit — a divine Person, to dwell with and in believers on earth. These three great truths mark the day in which we live; first, that there is a Man in the glory — Christ Jesus; secondly, there is a divine Person on earth — the Holy Spirit; thirdly, the Holy Spirit has come to form the Church, guide her through this world, and present her to Christ in the glory. A Comprehensive View

These are the great truths that pass before us in type in the twenty-fourth chapter of Genesis. The immense importance of the chapter lies in the fact that it presents in a picture what each divine Person in the Godhead is engaged in during the day in which we live. As we look around we see the increasing wickedness of the world, and the increasing failure and weakness of the people of God. Looking upon all this confusion we can easily become depressed and cast down. When, however, we look at the picture presented in this chapter we see in a comprehensive view what God is doing to carry out His own purposes. Other Scriptures may bring into prominence the faith as well as the failure of believers, for our encouragement and warning; but here there comes before us in all its blessedness what God is effecting for the glory of Christ, in spite of every

adverse influence, whether in ourselves, the world, or the devil. Seeing then what God is doing, and the object that He has before Him, and knowing that all that God has purposed He will assuredly carry out, will keep the soul at rest in the midst of a scene of turmoil. Moreover, it will make us intelligent in the mind of God and save us from disappointment from false expectations. Further, we shall be saved from expending our energies in so many activities that, while they have the benefit of the world in view, are wholly outside the purpose of God. In the course of the story there comes before us three main subjects: First, the directions of Abraham to his servant (vv. 1-9). Secondly, the mission of the servant in Mesopotamia (vv. 10-61). Thirdly, the meeting between Isaac and Rebekah in the land of Canaan (vv. 62-67). The Father's Purpose

Abraham's directions very blessedly set forth the counsels of God the Father concerning the Son, and what God is doing in the world today by the Holy Spirit in carrying out His purposes.

First, we learn that the great object of the servant's mission was, as Abraham said, to "take a wife unto my son.'' The servant was sent to Mesopotamia with this single object in view. Having found the bride and brought her to Isaac his mission would be accomplished. It was no part of the servant's work to interfere with the political or social interests of Mesopotamia. The Holy Spirit is not here to improve or reform the world, or bring peace to the nations, or even convert the world. He is not here to right the wrongs of the poor, or remove oppression, and relieve man from disease, and want, and misery.

There is One that in due time will, indeed, bring peace and blessing to the world. One who has been here and proved that He had the power and grace to relieve man of every pressure. Alas! we nailed Him to a cross, and He is gone, and so the misery of the world remains. Nevertheless, He is coming again to bring in the blessing; but, in the meantime Jesus is in the glory and the Holy Spirit is down here to obtain the bride for Christ — the heavenly people — and conduct her to Christ in the glory.

Christendom, alas, has so entirely missed the mind of God that it looks upon Christianity as merely a religious system for the improvement and uplift of man, in order, as it is said, to make the world a better and brighter place. If this is all that people see in Christianity little wonder that they are giving up its profession, for it is evident that after nineteen centuries the world grows worse rather than better, and today it is filled with increasing violence, and corruption, and men's hearts are failing them with fear of things coming upon the earth.

It is true that God, in His providence cares for His poor creatures and can, and does, restrain the evil of men, and that where the truth is received it will certainly bring a measure of improvement in temporal circumstances, but with our thoughts formed by the Word of God we shall see that the Holy Spirit is here to take a people out of the world for Christ in glory.

Then the servant is told that the bride for Isaac is not to be of the daughters of the Canaanites." Abraham says she is to be of "my kindred." The Canaanites were under the curse and devoted to judgment. There can be no link between Christ in the glory and a world under judgment. Isaac's bride was not to be a stranger but one that already belonged to Abraham's family. So the Church is formed not of unbelievers, nor of a mixture of believers and unbelievers, but wholly of the family of faith.

Further, the servant is warned that in no case is he to bring Isaac back to Mesopotamia. During the time that the servant was in Mesopotamia, Isaac was in Canaan, and there was no link between Isaac and the people of Mesopotamia. So, we know, today there is no direct link between Christ in the glory and the world as such. Failing to see this, the efforts of Christendom, as well as of many sincere Christians, are entirely directed to doing the very thing that the servant is twice warned not to do. The attempt is made, in a variety of different forms, to bring Christ back to the world and attach His Name to benevolent schemes for the reformation and improvement of the world. Such efforts are entirely outside the work of the Spirit who is here, not to bring Christ back to the world, but to take a people out of the world for Christ. It is true that in due time Christ is coming back to the world, but let us not forget that the last time the world saw Christ was upon the cross to which they had nailed Him. The next time they see Him will be when He comes "in flaming fire taking vengeance upon them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

Finally the servant is told that God’s angel would go before him. We know that the angels are "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation." Their service ever seems to be of a providential and guardian character. The Holy Spirit deals with souls, while the angels would seem to act in relation to circumstances. An angel may direct Philip as to the way he should take; but the Spirit directed him in dealing with a soul (Acts 8:26, Acts 8:29). The Servant’s Mission This portion of the story is rich with instruction for our souls seeing that it typically presents, not only the object of the coming of the Holy Spirit, but also the way the Spirit takes to carry out this object. The servant comes to Mesopotamia well equipped for is service, for we read, "All the goods of his master were in his hand," reminding us that the Holy Spirit has come to teach us "all things," to guide us into "all truth," and show us "all things that the Father hath" (John 14:26; John 16:13-15). The servant’s work in Mesopotamia has a fourfold character: First, he finds the bride appointed for Isaac (Genesis 24:10-21); secondly, having found the bride, he distinguishes her from all others (Genesis 24:22); thirdly, he weans her heart from Mesopotamia, and attaches her affections to Isaac (Genesis 24:23-53); finally, he leads her across the desert to Isaac (Genesis 24:54-61). The Bride Found

First, then, we learn from the prayer of the servant, the great purpose of his mission. He does not pray for the men of the city, or their daughters; he is engrossed with one object, to find the one appointed for Isaac. The Holy Spirit has come, not to convert the world, but to bring to light the elect of God — the bride appointed for Christ.

Moreover, we see that the infallible sign of the appointed bride will be that she is marked by grace. The servant prays, "Let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher I pray thee that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac." From these words it is clear that the servant was not sent to select a bride from the daughters of men for Isaac, but to find the appointed bride (Genesis 24:14), and that grace would be her characteristic mark. The prayer is granted, for when Rebekah comes upon the scene and is put to the test, she answers to the servant’s request, and says, "I will draw for thy camels also." In all this we are reminded of the Spirit working in grace in those who are the "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father through sanctification of the Spirit" (1 Peter 1:2). The Bride Adorned

Secondly, the servant, having found the appointed bride is not content with a work of grace which he can see, but, he publicly distinguishes the bride from all others by adorning her with the golden earrings and the bracelets of gold, which others can see. Not only is the Spirit here to produce a work of grace in the believer, but there is to be seen in the believer the fruits of being sealed by the Spirit - love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, and self-control. These precious jewels would become a witness to others, and distinguish the believer from the world around. The Story Told

Thirdly, we see the pains that the servant takes to link the affections of Rebekah with Isaac. Again, this sets forth the work of the Spirit whereby believers are strengthened in the inner man in order that Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith. This part of the servant's work is introduced by the question, "Is there room in thy father's house for us to lodge in?" Very blessedly Rebekah's answer again goes beyond the servant's request. He only asks for "room;" she says there is "provision" as well as room (Genesis 24:25). Laban, too, can say to the servant, "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord." So we read, "The man came into the house" (Genesis 24:31-32). The Holy Spirit has come to take of the things of Christ and show them unto us (John 16:14). But we do well to take home to ourselves this great question, "Is there room?" Are we prepared to put ourselves about to make room for the Holy Spirit? The flesh and the Spirit "are contrary the one to the other" (Galatians 5:17). We cannot entertain the Spirit if ministering to the flesh. To make room for the Spirit, and to be minding the things of the flesh is impossible. Are we prepared to refuse the indulgence of the flesh in the passing things of time, in order to make room for the Spirit to lead us into the deep and eternal things of God? Are we making room and provision for the Spirit? "Room" and "provision" were made in the house of Bethuel for the servant of Abraham, with the result that the servant is able to speak of Isaac, to engage the affections of Rebekah with Isaac, and lead her to Isaac. The Bride Won

Having been warmly welcomed into the house, at once the servant bears witness to Isaac. He reveals the mind of his master concerning Isaac, and so doing he takes of the things of Isaac and shows them unto Rebekah. He speaks of the wealth of his master, and shows that all is given to Isaac — "Unto him hath he given all that he hath." So the Lord, Himself, tells us that "All things that the Father hath are Mine," and that the work Of the Spirit will be to take of His things and show them unto us (John 16:15). The Response

Having spoken of Isaac and the purpose of Abraham for the blessing of Isaac, the servant pauses to see the effect of his message. Does not the Spirit deal with us in like manner? Does He not wait to see if we respond to His unfoldings of Christ, before He makes us the public witness to Christ? In the picture there is a ready response, with the result that at once "the servant brought forth jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment, and gave them to Rebekah." In like manner if we respond to the unfoldings of the Spirit concerning Christ, will He not make us the witnesses of redeeming love — the jewels of silver; the witnesses of divine righteousness - the jewels of gold; and the witnesses of practical sanctification — the raiment. The Decision Made

Finally, having engaged the affections of Rebekah with Isaac, the servant's one great aim is to lead Rebekah to Isaac. The servant says, "Send me away to my master." He had come to find the bride, and having accomplished that end, he would fain be away. He had not come to find the bride and settle her in her old home, but to lead her into a new home. The relatives would detain

Rebekah at least ten days. The servant’s desire is to be away, and by his report of Isaac, he forms the same mind in Rebekah. If we allow the Holy Spirit to have His way with us — if we hinder Him not, He will form our minds according to His mind, to think as He thinks about Christ, to detach our hearts from the things where Christ is not, and to engage our affections with Christ where He is. Too often we hinder the work of the Spirit by clinging to the world, its politics, its pleasures, and its religion. But the world cannot hinder if our hearts are set upon reaching Christ in glory. The brother and mother may seek to detain Rebekah, but after all, the decision rested with her. They said, "We will call the damsel and inquire at her mouth." So the great question for Rebekah is, "Wilt thou go with this man?" This is still the question for each one of us. Do we recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit, and are we prepared at all cost to follow His leading?

Christendom has almost entirely ignored the presence of the Spirit, with the result that the great profession has settled down in the world that has rejected Christ and from which Christ is absent. It is a great moment when our hearts are so attached to Christ in the glory that, like Rebekah of old, we say, "I will go." A Pathway Followed The immediate result of her decision was that "they sent away Rebekah their sister, and her nurse, and Abraham’s servant and his men." If we let it be known that we are forgetting the things that are behind and are set for heavenly things, it will not be simply a question of our giving up the world, but the world will give us up; we shall be "sent away."

Then we read that "Rebekah arose. . . and followed the man; and the servant took Rebekah, and went his way." Believers, oftentimes, while gladly submitting to God’s way of salvation, would fain go their own way to heaven. Our exercise should be to know "His way" and to follow as He leads. To follow the Spirit will not be to follow some inner light, as men speak, but will ever be to walk according to the Word of God; and the Spirit, using the Word of God will always gather to Christ.

Thus Rebekah, following the man, finds herself on a wilderness journey. For the moment she has neither the home of Laban, nor the home of Isaac. So if we follow the leading of the Spirit, we shall find, as one has said, that, "We have neither the earth in which we are, nor heaven to which we are going." Nevertheless, as Rebekah travelled the four hundred miles of desert journey, she has a bright prospect before her, for at the end, Isaac, to whom her heart has been attached, is waiting to receive her. In like spirit the Apostle Paul, with Christ in the glory at the end of his pilgrim path, can say, "One thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I pursue, looking towards the goal for the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus" (Php 3:13-14, N.Tr.). The Goal Reached The mission of the servant in Mesopotamia ever had in view the great day when the bride, having been guided across the desert, is presented to Isaac. In all these scenes Isaac had taken no active part, nor had he left the land of Canaan. All was left in the hands of the servant. Nevertheless, Isaac was far from indifferent to the mission of the servant, and the coming of the bride. At eventide Isaac comes from the way of the well Lahai-roi to meet the bride. The significant meaning of the well is said to be "the well of him that liveth and seeth." If this is so, it would suggest the undoubted truth that all through our wilderness journey we are under the eye of One who lives and sees. As the Apostle says, "He is able also to save them to the uttermost . . . seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them (Hebrews 7:25). The Coming

Further we see that Isaac definitely comes to meet the bride, for Rebekah enquires, "What man is this that walketh in the fields to meet us?" The picture presents Isaac as one who is waiting for and wanting, his bride. Our desires after Christ may often be feeble, but He ever longs for the moment when His bride will be presented to Him. Ere He went away, He could say to His disciples, 'If I go . . . I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:3). The Marriage When at last Rebekah sees Isaac, "she took a veil and covered herself." Immediately, the marriage follows, for we read, "Isaac took Rebekah . . . and she became his wife and he loved her." So, too, after our wilderness journey, when the great work of the Holy Spirit is accomplished, and for the first time we see the Lord Jesus face to face — when He receives us to Himself — then at last these wonderful words will be fulfilled, "The marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready." When creation was completed, Eve was presented to Adam as his bride, the first type of the great mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, and which tells of God's eternal purpose to secure a bride for His Son. Through the long centuries, and amidst all changing dispensations, God has ever kept in view the great day of the marriage of the Lamb. God's people may fail and break down, as they have done in every dispensation; the world, increasing in violence and corruption may tempt and often overcome the people of God; the devil may oppose and set up the false woman who becomes drunk with the blood of saints. Nevertheless, in spite of the failure of God's people, the efforts of the devil and the temptations of the world, God never turns aside from His great purpose to secure a bride for His Son. At the end of God's Book we are permitted to see in vision the great day of the marriage of the Lamb, and at the very close we have a beautiful presentation of Jesus waiting for the bride, and the bride, in her true attitude, as led by the Spirit, looking for the coming of Jesus. "The Spirit and the bride say, Come." His answer is, "Surely I come quickly," and the bride responds, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." The Incentive for Us

How much disappointment we should be saved if, in all our service we ever had before us the great object that is ever before the Spirit of God — the presentation of the Church to Christ without spot or wrinkle or any such thing on the great day of the marriage of the Lamb. Our view, and our service, is too often narrowed down to a small locality and our little day; then when everything seems to fail locally, and generally, we are broken-hearted and disappointed. If, however, our great object is to gather souls to Christ in view of the marriage of the Lamb we shall not be disappointed, whatever the sorrow and failure by the way. There will be no broken hearts, no regrets, no disappointments when at last we hear the voice of a great multitude, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come." Let us then press forward through sorrows, through trials, through weakness, through every kind of opposition, knowing that at the end there is the great day of the marriage of the Lamb. The typical teaching of these chapters closes with the account of Abraham's children by Keturah, given in the first six verses of chapter twenty-five. These children, from whom many Eastern nations have their origin, receive "gifts," and thus come in for blessing through their connection with Abraham. Nevertheless, Isaac is placed in striking contrast to the other sons of Abraham. To others he may give gifts; to Isaac he gives all that he has. This may set forth in type the great truth that Christ, Is risen from the dead, is the Heir of all things, and that after receiving His heavenly bride, He will enter upon the earthly inheritance in connection with restored Israel, while the nations of the earth will also receive blessing. The deeply instructive history of Abraham closes with the brief record of his peaceful end at "a good old age,"

and the burial by his sons Isaac and Ishmael in the cave of Machpelah. Thus in striking contrast to poor Lot, Abraham finishes his pilgrim path with the respect and honour due to one who was "the friend of God," and "the father of all them that believe."

MEMORIALS OF ABRAHAM by Horatius Bonar Only a tomb, no more, A future resting place When God shall lay thee down and bid All thy long wanderings cease. This cave and field — no more Canst thou thy dwelling call That land of thine, plains, hills, woods, streams, The stranger has it all.

Thy altar and thy tent Are all that thou hast here. With these content thou passest on. A homeless wanderer.

Thy life unrest and toil, Thy course a pilgrimage, Only in death thou goest down To claim thy heritage. A heritage of life Beyond this guarded gloom, A kingdom, not a field or cave, A city, not a tomb.

Chapter 6

S. An Open Letter On Present Exercises.

An Open Letter On Present Exercises.

Hamilton Smith.

July, 1938.

Beloved Brethren in the Lord, This letter is written in the humble hope that it may be some little help to those gathered to the Name of the Lord, who, in many parts of this country, as well as in other lands, are deeply distressed by individuals, and in a few cases by meetings, that, in spite of protest, persist in having intercommunion with Open Brethren meetings, and thus take a course which, it is feared, if not firmly refused, must lead to further division among the people of God.

It is common knowledge that in America a division has been caused amongst the so-called Grant Brethren owing to the fact that certain individuals, and meetings, have persisted in taking a course that has led them into intercommunion with Open Brethren.

Further, we have recently seen how a large number of the so-called "Lowe" (or "Elberfeld") Brethren in Germany have, not only abandoned the truths of the Assembly in order to meet the demands of political leaders, but have also departed from divine principles by the further retrograde step of amalgamation with the Open Brethren. In the face of these facts it surely becomes us to raise our voices, not only against this solemn departure from the path of separation, but also on behalf of the truths involved. Thus, while seeking to avoid all personalities, the writer would seek to call attention to the great principles that are at stake; to warn brethren against the methods by which the enemy is seeking to rob the Lord’s people of the truth; to arouse exercise as to the low spiritual condition that exposes the people of God to such attacks; to appeal to the consciences of those who are leading in this down-grade movement; and to encourage those who oppose it to stand fast in the Lord and the power of His might.

Looking back over the long history of the professing Church we can thankfully own that there have been gracious revivals of evangelical truths. But, beyond all such revivals, let us not forget that, in the early part of the last century, the Lord recovered to many of His people the great truths concerning Christ and the Church. At that time the eyes of many were opened to see, not only the absolute necessity and importance of the knowledge of forgiveness and justification, but that, beyond all these personal blessings with which the mass of believers are content, there are the deeper truths of the calling and purpose of God unfolded to us in the mystery concerning "Christ and the Church."

Thus the truth of the Church in its different aspects was gradually recovered to the people of God. Believers were seen to be "One flock" under "One Shepherd"; the one Body of which Christ is the Head; the House of God for an habitation of God through the Spirit; and as the Bride espoused to Christ.

It was further seen that distinct privileges and blessings are connected with these different aspects of the Church. It became clear that as the "one flock" the people of God are viewed as "strangers and pilgrims" passing through this wilderness world wholly dependent upon "one Shepherd" for spiritual food, and protection from every foe. As the one body of which Christ is the Head, it was seen that the people of God are viewed as a heavenly people united to, and represented in, their Head in heaven, and as the one body, are left here to represent the moral excellencies of Christ on earth. As the House of God it was seen that believers are viewed as "the pillar and base of the truth" to witness to the grace of God in the power of the Holy Spirit. As the Bride of Christ, it was seen that Scripture views the people of God as taken up for the satisfaction of the heart of Christ, and as such are to be subject to Him in response to His love.

Further it was seen that these privileges and blessings entail corresponding responsibilities. If God gives light, it is incumbent that we should walk in consistency with the light. At once the question arose, How can we take up our responsibilities, and walk according to the light that God has given, and yet remain in religious systems which, by their constitution, doctrines, and practice, in different measures, set aside every truth ’concerning "Christ and the Church"? In answer to this question it was found that Scripture provides for this day of ruin, and that the individual who desires to answer to the mind of the Lord is instructed to "depart from iniquity"; to "purge" himself from vessels to dishonour; "turn away" from the mere religious profession that has "form of piety," but denies the power thereof; and, having separated from the evil, is to "follow righteousness, faith, love, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart."

Thus the believers, to whom these truths were recovered, found that if they answered to the truth of the "one flock," and followed Christ as the "One Shepherd," they would be led outside the camp and every religious system formed after the pattern of the camp. (John 10:3; Hebrews 13:13) Further, they found that if they walked in the light of the one Body of which Christ is the Head, at once they were outside every religious system which in practice is a denial of the one body, or sets aside the Headship of Christ. Again, they found that if they walked as becomes those who form the House of God, at once they must refuse every religious system which, by its human organization, ignores the presence of the Holy Spirit. Lastly, if walking according to the truth of the Church as the Bride of Christ, they found that, in devotedness to Christ, they must refuse all teaching that would draw their hearts from Christ by presenting "another Jesus," "another Spirit," or "another gospel." (2 Corinthians 11:2-4) Thus, in order to answer to the light, those to whom these truths had been recovered separated from the religious systems of men in order to gather to Christ alone in the outside place of reproach.

But, as in Apostolic days, the great effort of the enemy was to rob the saints of this great mystery concerning Christ and the Church, so from the moment of this recovery of the truth, the enemy has unceasingly sought to rob us of these truths. He has sought to accomplish this end in two ways; first, by seeking to lead us to adopt principles which, in practice, deny these truths; and secondly, by seeking to lead us to abandon the path of separation in which alone they can be carried out. The first great effort to lead believers to adopt principles destructive of the Church in its practical administration was made in connection with the Open Brethren movement which had its origin in a meeting known as "Bethesda," Bristol. Of this movement, one has given a true summary, as follows:- "The avowed principle of the ’open’ communion of the independency of each one gathering of every other is — we know — contrary to the One Lordship of Christ, to the truth that

He is Head, to the fact that there is one Spirit, to the consideration that the instructions given in the Word of God to one gathering are in view of, and for the guidance of, all gatherings in Christian fellowship (1 Corinthians 1:2; 1 Corinthians 4:17; 1 Corinthians 7:17; 1 Corinthians 14:33-34; Revelation 2:7, Revelation 2:11, Revelation 2:17, Revelation 2:29, Revelation 3:6, Revelation 3:13, Revelation 3:22); and it is inconsistent with the 'partnership' (fellowship) to which all Christians in every place are called (1 Corinthians 1:9), and with the truth that there is one body, energised by one `ego,' Christ. These truths recovered to us by the grace of God, are distinctly challenged in these days by the principles of independency affirmed by `open' brethren as such, and are rendered the more alluring and deceptive to the ordinary Christian by the undeniably evangelical activities of those who profess them. We would acknowledge that which is of God in any Christian, and thankfully do so; yet if Christians justify principles destructive of the testimony of the Lord because they are held in common with much gospel interest, we cannot accept this as the true way of the Church according to Scripture." (W.H.W.) For several generations those to whom these truths had been recovered realised the seriousness of this movement. They saw that inasmuch as those who were led away into this independent movement had given up the light, they were, in this respect, in a far more serious position than believers in the sects who had never received the light. Thus those who sought to remain true to the light God had given firmly refused to have fellowship or intercommunion with gatherings of Open Brethren. But what has been the recent history of those to whom so much light has been given? Have we not to confess that of late years there has been a gradual tendency to decline from God's principles, to forsake the old paths and seek a wider path which entails little reproach and is more popular and pleasing to the vanity of the flesh? One has truly said, "The principles of God may be deserted by easy gradations. They may first be relaxed, then forgotten, then despised. They may pass from a firm hand into an easy one, from thence to an indifferent one, and find themselves at last flung away by a rebellious one. Many have at first stood for God's principles in the face of difficulties . . , then merely grieved over the loss of them, . . . then, been careless about their loss or maintenance . . . . and at last, with a high hand broken them." (J.G.B.) Have not these words a solemn voice for us in this our day? Have we not to admit that the great truths concerning Christ and the Church have been largely neglected? We read hardly anything of them in printed ministry; we hear little of them in public ministry, and they are seldom mentioned in the prayer meeting. It is not, indeed, that we have given up the gospel: but is there not a real danger of sinking down into evangelism without the mystery? It has been truly said that, "The mass of Christians would be satisfied to see the saints up to the gospel with "good conduct, and good works." But as in Paul's' day, so in this, if we are to enter into "the full assurance of understanding to the full knowledge of the mystery of God" it will entail "great conflict."

Moreover, the enemy is not only seeking to rob us of the truth by the neglect of the truth itself, but, it is increasingly evident that he is seeking to do so by leading us into intercommunion with Open Brethren and thus out of the path of holy separation which is alone consistent with those truths. This movement has shown itself in two ways; first by individuals in different meetings, persistently ministering in Open Meetings (and in some cases breaking bread). Secondly, by meetings not only approving of individuals going to Open Meetings to minister, but also inviting Open Brethren to minister in their midst, and thus, by the "interchange of pulpits" leading to all barriers being broken down and to the ultimate inter-communion with the independent position, by the underhand method of "peaceful penetration".

Wherever this course has been taken, whether by individuals or meetings, it has invariably led to sorrow, confusion, and disintegration. We may well ask, then, Have not those who have taken this course ceased to follow "righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those who call upon the Lord out of a pure heart"? As one has said, "To profess to be separated to Christ — and this is the only consistent cause of our being where we are — and yet to dabble on every possible occasion in every or any system from which truth demands separation, is not righteousness." (W.H.W.) To seek to escape reproach by taking a wider path, with its numbers and popularity, and approval of the religious world, is not faith. To take a path that only brings sorrow and confusion among those in the outside place, and bolsters up our fellow believers in false systems that do not give Christ His place as the "one Lord," nor the Holy Spirit His place in the Assembly, is surely a heartless disregard of love. To deliberately pursue a course that ignores the consciences of the Lord's people, and leads to further scattering and division, cannot be the way of peace.

Those who prefer this wider path can easily take it, and do all that they are doing without bringing any confusion among the people of God, by simply withdrawing from those who have always firmly refused this course as contrary to the mind of the Lord. This surely would be the only upright path for such to take. Alas! seeing there are individuals and meetings that refuse to take this course, the question arises how are those to act who desire to maintain what they know to be the truth? In the case of individuals, who, after all protest, persist in associating with Open Brethren meetings, and thus "cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine ye have believed," we are definitely told to "avoid" such. (Romans 16:17) Where this instruction has been faithfully acted upon, the meetings have been finally delivered from such troublers by their ultimate withdrawal, for no one can remain in a meeting who is avoided by all. In the case of meetings, that definitely take independent ground, the only course is for the neighbouring meetings to take the matter into godly consideration, and if every protest and appeal is unavailing, to refuse to have further fellowship with the meeting. In a few cases our brethren have been compelled to take this sorrowful course, and hitherto, acting in the truth of the one body and the one Lord, the judgment of the neighbouring meetings has been respected by brethren generally and thus we have been spared the sorrow of further division.

Recently, however, a more serious exercise has arisen inasmuch as cases have occurred of meetings taking independent ground while the neighbouring meetings refuse to take action. Thus there arises a class which while not going to the extreme lengths of independency yet refuse to raise any protest against those who do so. Such take a neutral position and, it is to be feared, under the name of charity fall into the snare of indifferentism, and thus fail in love to their brethren, and faithfulness to the Lord. This presents difficulties of a more serious nature, for it is evident if those in the immediate neighbourhood of a meeting taking independent ground refuse to act, then those further afield, who desire to retain the truth and act for the Lord's people and the Lord's glory, will, for their own protection, have to act. In so doing they must remember that they are not dealing with an ordinary matter of local discipline but with an abandonment of principle that concerns us all. Thus it would seem the only course, if protests and appeals are unavailing, is to firmly refuse to have fellowship with the independent meeting, in spite of the refusal of the neutrals to take action.

Furthermore, we must surely feel that it is not enough to judge and refuse this independent movement, but that it also becomes us to humble ourselves for the low spiritual condition that has

made such a movement possible. That which brought about the ruin of the church at the start was a low moral condition, as the Apostle had to write, "All seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." Like the returned remnant of Haggai's day who ceased to build the house of the Lord and occupied themselves with their own houses — and thus failed in the very purpose for which they had been brought back to the land — so we, in our day, have failed to maintain the truths for which we have been delivered from the Babylonish captivity of the sects, and have settled down in our own things seeking our own ease and respectability. Does it not, then, behove us all to humble ourselves before the Lord for our failure, and judge ourselves for our worldliness and the consequent neglect of the truths so graciously recovered to us?

Thus humbling ourselves in His presence may we not count upon the compassions of the Lord, seeking that He might graciously stem this downgrade movement, and grant a little reviving by drawing us to Himself, and to one another, in obedience to His words, and in the bonds of His love?

It has been said that whatever truth God has been pleased to give to men He commits it first to their responsibility to hold in its integrity. Secondly, that men always fail in their responsibility. Thirdly, that the truth men have failed to maintain, God in His grace makes good in a remnant. Thus, in spite of all the failure and disintegration that has taken place amongst those who have received so much light, may we not confidently trust that, in this land as well as in others, there will be found until the end, the twos and threes seeking to walk in the old paths, and who, in great outward weakness; will seek to keep the Lord's word, and not deny His Name. May it be our earnest desire to be found of this number when the Lord comes!

If then, in the face of every opposition we are to hold fast that which we have, that no man take our crown, it can only be as we "Stand fast in the Lord"; are of "The same mind in the Lord"; as we "Rejoice in the Lord" and remember that "The Lord is near." (Revelation 3:11; Php 3:1-2, Php 4:4-5)

Looking at the sorrowful and divided condition that exists amongst those to whom so much light has been given, we may be tempted to lose all hope and say with Jeremiah of old, "The anger of the LORD hath divided them; He will no more regard them. . . . Our end is near, our days are fulfilled; for our end is come" (Lamentations 4:16, Lamentations 4:18). Nevertheless, if we look above and beyond all the failure, to the Lord, faith will also say with Jeremiah, "Thou, O LORD, remainest for ever; thy throne from generation to generation. . . Turn thou us unto Thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old." (Lamentations 5:19, Lamentations 5:21) Yours affectionately in the Lord, HAMILTON SMITH.

S. At His Feet.

At His Feet.

Hamilton Smith. Of all the disciples of Christ that pass before us in the Gospel story, perhaps none are more marked by single-hearted devotedness to Christ than Mary of Bethany. She makes nothing of self, but everything of Christ, and hence, on the three occasions that she comes before us, she is found at the feet of Jesus.

We see her first in her sister's home at Bethany, when the Lord of life entered that home and Mary sat at His feet as a learner (Luke 10:1-42). Later, when death had entered the home, she is found at His feet as a mourner (John 11:1-57). Lastly, when a few of His loved ones make a supper for the Lord, who had just manifested His resurrection power and glory, she is found at His feet as a worshipper.

She not only knew that the Lord was the great Teacher come from God, the One who can sympathise with us in our sorrows, and the Object of our worship, but she had experienced His teaching, tasted His sympathy, and worshipped at His feet.

Good for us if, like the Apostle Paul, we can each say that the desire of the heart is "That I may know Him." We may know much about Christ, but, in order to know Him we must be in His company and, at His feet, learn His mind through His word, taste His sympathy, and in His presence worship and adore.

It is true that the Lord delights to honour the one that puts honour upon Him in the day of His rejection, and has said that wheresoever the gospel is preached the story of Mary shall be told for a memorial of her. But the story of Mary has also been recorded for our profit, for all Scripture is given by God for our instruction. May we then, as we read her story, profit by her lowly and devoted life.

1. AT HIS FEET AS A LEARNER Luke 10:38-42

If, as sinners, we have been at the feet of the Saviour discovering that, in spite of all our sins, He loves us and has died for us, then, if we are to make spiritual progress — if we are to be "meet for the Master's use and prepared unto every good work" — the "one thing needful," as believers, is to take our place at His feet and hear His word. This plain but important truth is brought before us in the homely scene described in the five closing verses of the tenth chapter of the Gospel of Luke. Journeying on His way to Jerusalem, we are told that the Lord came to a certain village, and a certain woman named Martha received Him into her house. She gladly opened her home to the Lord, and at once set herself to minister to His bodily needs. This indeed was right and beautiful in its place; and yet the story clearly shows that there was much of self in Martha's service. She did not like to have all the burden of this service, and felt grieved that she was left to serve alone. There was one thing lacking in her service. The one thing needful — the one thing that Martha missed — was to sit at the feet of Jesus and hear His word. She loved the Lord, and with all her

energy she zealously set herself to serve the Lord; but her zeal was not according to knowledge. She set herself to work without having first been in the company of the Lord, and in communion with the Lord, and therefore without being instructed in the mind of the Lord through the word of the Lord. As a result she was "distracted with much serving," was "careful and troubled about many things," complaining about her sister, and even entertaining the thought that the Lord was indifferent to her labours.

Alas! do we not, at times, act like Martha, We may take up service according to our own thoughts, or under the direction of others. From morning to night we may busy ourselves in a continual round of activity, and yet neglect the one thing needful — to be alone with the Lord, and in communion with Him hear His word and learn His mind. Little wonder that we get "distracted," and "troubled about many things," and complain of others. How true it is that it is easier to spend whole days in a round of busy service, than half an hour alone with Jesus. In Mary we see a believer who chose the "good part." Sometimes it is said that Mary chose the better part, as if Martha's part was good, but Mary's was better. It is not thus that the Lord speaks. He definitely says that Mary's part was "that good part," for she chose the "one thing needful" — to sit at His feet and hear His word.

Clearly, then, Mary had a keener perception of the desires of the heart of Christ than her sister. One has said, "Martha's eye saw His weariness, and would give to Him: Mary's faith apprehended His fulness, and would draw from Him."

Martha thought of the Lord only as One who was requiring something from us; Mary discerned that, beyond all the service of which He is so worthy, the desire of His heart, and the great purpose of His coming into this world, was to communicate something to us, "Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ," and, at the end of His path He could say, "I have given unto them the words which Thou gayest Me" (John 17:1-26). By the word of God salvation is brought to us (Acts 13:26); by the word of God we are born again (1 Peter 1:23); by the word of God we are cleansed from defilement (John 15:3); by the word of God we are sanctified (John 17:17); and by the word of God we are instructed in all the truth of God "that the man of God maybe thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:15-17). May we not say that Martha set herself to do good works without having been thoroughly furnished by the word of God. In Mary we learn that communion with Christ, and instruction in the word of Christ must precede all service that is acceptable to Christ. He delights that, in His own time and way, we should minister to Him; but, above all, He delights to have us in His company that He may minister to us.

Mary chose this good part and the Lord will not allow any complaints by her sister to belittle her choice — it shall not be taken from her. So, again, in the last days of the Church's history on earth, the Lord commends the Philadelphians, not for any great activity that would give them a prominent place before the world, but that they had "kept His word." Like Mary of old they set greater store on His word than their works. It is not, indeed, that Mary was without works, for having chosen "that good part," in due time the Lord commends her for doing "a good work" (Matthew 26:10). So with the Philadelphian saints, the Lord who commended them for keeping His word, is the One who can say "I know thy works." Of old Moses could say of the LORD, "Yea, He loved the people; all His saints are in Thy hand; and they sat down at Thy feet; every one shall receive of Thy words" (Deuteronomy 33:3). This presents a lovely picture of the true position of God's people — held in the hand of the Lord; sitting at the feet of the Lord, and listening to the words of the Lord. Secure in

His hand; at rest at His feet; and learning His mind. May we, then, choose this good part, and in due course do the good work.

2. AT HIS FEET AS A MOURNER John 11:32 In the touching scene described in the eleventh chapter of John, we again hear of the two sisters, Martha and Mary. Sickness had ended in death casting its shadow over the home. Their brother has been taken from them. In their trouble they rightly turn to the Lord as their unfailing resource, and very blessedly they plead His love for their brother, for they say, "He whom thou lovest is sick." This, indeed, was true, the Lord loved Lazarus, but we are also told that "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." And as the story proceeds we are permitted to see the way love takes in order to declare, on the one hand, the glory of the Son of God, and, on the other, the compassions of the heart of Jesus.

Further, we again see the difference between these two devoted women. Martha who, on the former occasion, had been cumbered with her service when the Lord of life and glory had visited her house, is now restless and distracted when death has come into the home. Mary who, in the former day, had listened to His word, can now quietly wait for Him to speak and act. Thus we read, "Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet Him: but Mary sat still in the house." When, however, she received the word, "The Master is come and calleth for thee," she at once acts in obedience to the word, for we read, "She arose quickly, and came unto Him."

"Then when Mary had come where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet." For the second time this devoted woman is found in the lowly place at the feet of Jesus. The Jews, mistaking her action, say, "She goeth unto the grave to weep there." She was doing that which is far better, that which faith alone can do; she was going to the feet of Jesus to weep there. To weep at the grave of a loved one even the world can do, but it brings no comfort to the sorrowing heart. But to weep at the feet of Jesus is to find the comfort of His love, for we weep at the feet of One who, in His own time, can raise our dead, and, in the meantime, can comfort our hearts. So it came to pass that Mary, who had been at His feet as a learner is now found at His feet as a mourner.

It is noticeable that in this touching scene there is no record of any word spoken by the Lord to Mary. This only we learn that, in the presence of her great sorrow, "Jesus wept." The Jews wrongly interpret these tears as being a token of the Lord’s love for Lazarus. He did indeed love Lazarus, but there was no need to weep for one that He was about to raise from the dead. It was the sorrow of the living that drew forth the tears of Jesus, as we read, "When Jesus saw her weeping . . . He grieved in spirit and was troubled," and His trouble found vent in tears, for "Jesus wept." In the days of old we read of Jehovah that, "He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds" (Psalms 147:3). In order to heal the broken-hearted He became flesh, and shed His tears to dry ours, and broke His heart to bind up our hearts. And Jesus is still the same — "The same yesterday, today, and for ever." In our sorrows, and when our loved ones are taken from us, we still learn that our only real and lasting comfort is found in bowing at His feet, and pouring out our sorrow in the presence of the One who once wept with these broken-hearted women.

3. AT HIS FEET AS A WORSHIPPER John 12:1-50 The beautiful scene that passes before us in the beginning of the twelfth chapter of John, takes place just six days before the cross. The Lord’s devoted life, in which self was ever set aside to serve others in love, draws to its close. At every step of His path He had been dispensing blessing — spreading a feast, as it were, for all the world.

Now, at last, a few of His loved ones make a feast for Him, as we read, "There they made Him a supper."

Christ was in this needy world as a Giver, but it was not often that anyone gave to Him. Once, in the beginning of His way, a few wise men "presented unto Him gifts" and had fallen down and "worshipped Him." Now, at the end of His path, they make a supper for Him and, again, one is found at His feet with her gifts as a worshipper.

Truly, too, there had been a moment when Levi had made Him "a great feast in his own house." There the Lord had sat down with "a great company of publicans and others" in order to dispense blessing to sinners. Now He sits down in company with a few of His own in order to receive the homage of saints.

Christ is the One for Whom they make the supper — the centre of the feast and the Object before every heart. Lazarus, and others, are present, but, we read, they "sat at the table with Him." The supper was for Him, and the guests were "with Him. "The blessedness, and the greatness, of the occasion was that He, the Son of God, was present.

Again, the two sisters, Martha and Mary, are present. Martha serves, but no longer is she cumbered with her service, or complaining of others. She thinks only of the One for whom they had made the supper. For the third time Mary is found at the feet of the Lord, but no longer to receive His words and His sympathy, but to give to Him the worship of a heart that loved Him, for Mary’s gifts, Mary’s acts, and Mary’s attitude, all breathe the spirit of worship.

Drawn by attachment of heart to Christ she had sat at His feet, listened to His words and learned something of His mind. Now we see that affection for Christ is the secret of all true service. Moved by this love for Christ she does the right thing at the right moment. She might have left the ointment in the alabaster box and presented it to Christ, but this would not have put the same honour upon Christ. She pours it out upon His feet. She does the right act She might, at some earlier moment in the Lord’s life, have anointed His feet with the ointment, but she waits until the hour of His going to the cross and the grave has arrived. Moved by the instincts of love she does the right act at the right moment, as the Lord can say, "Against the day of my burying hath she kept this." Christ was everything to Mary. Christ was her life, and all that she has is devoted to Him. The costly ointment, and the hair of her head — the glory of a woman — are used to put honour upon Christ. She is not even praising Him for all that He had done, or was about to do, but she bows at His feet as a worshipper because of all that He is.

Thus acting she puts honour upon the One that the world had rejected and was about to nail to a cross. She forgets herself, and her blessings, and thinks only of Christ. How blessed, if, when we make Him a supper, in a like spirit of worship we could each one pass out of sight of ourselves, and our blessings, and see no man any more save Jesus only and His glory.

Thus acting we should, like Mary in her day, be misunderstood by the world, and even by many true disciples, but we should, also like Mary, have the approval of the Lord. In the eyes of the world her act was mere waste. So in Christendom today, Christianity is viewed merely as a system for making the world a better and a brighter place. The one great aim is to benefit man; all else is waste. In one parable the Lord likens the Kingdom of Heaven to "a certain King that made a wedding feast for His Son." In the spirit of this parable the disciples had made a supper for the

Lord, and Mary had put honour upon Christ. And though the world may condemn, the Lord approves for He says, "Let her alone," and again, in another gospel, He can say, "She hath wrought a good work upon Me." Indeed, so highly does the Lord appreciate Mary's act that He adds, "Wheresoever this gospel is preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her" (Matthew 26:13).

Moreover, the Lord can say, "Me ye have not always." It will be our privilege and our joy to worship Him in glory, but it was Mary's privilege, and it is still ours, to worship Him in the world where He is rejected, and in the face of scorn and reproach of men. Mary seized the occasion to render to Him this precious service. As one has said, "She never could have recalled it in eternity . . . Love will find new ways of expressing itself to Him then. But it will not be what He looks for from us now. There will be no self to be denied, no cross to be borne, no world to be surrendered, no reproach to be encountered then."

How blessed, too, was the effect of her act of devotion to Christ, for we read, "the house was filled with the odour of the ointment." Lazarus may hold sweet communion with Christ, and Martha may serve Christ, but Mary's act of worship, that was so precious to the heart of Christ, was also a joy to all that were in the house. That which gives honour to Christ will bring blessing to others.

We may rightly commune with Christ about many things, we may rightly serve Him in many ways, but the worship that makes everything of Christ will surpass all else in the day when we make Him a supper. So will it be in that great day when all the redeemed are gathered home. The new song will be sung, that renders praise to the Lord for all that He has done. Heaven and earth will join to celebrate His glory, but, above all we read of those who "fell down and worshipped Him." Beyond all the mighty work that He has done, and beyond all the glory that He has acquired, He will be worshipped because of all that He is. Then we shall be able to say, The heart is satisfied; can ask no more;

All thought of self is now for ever o'er:

Christ, its unmingled Object, fills the heart In blest adoring love — its endless part.

S. Bless the Lord at All Times.

"Bless the Lord at All Times."

Psalms 34:1-22.

Hamilton Smith.

(Extracted from Scripture Truth Vol. 43, 1968, pages 23-4.)

(Psalms 24:1). Psalms 34:1-22 presents the experience by which a godly man learnt to bless the LORD at all times. It is easy to bless the Lord sometimes, when circumstances are favourable, but only faith, that that has proved His goodness and faithfulness, can bless the Lord at all times. Thus lifted above all circumstances the Lord is praised "continually."

(Psalms 34:2). This spirit, that can praise the Lord at all times, will only be found in one who has unshaken confidence in the Lord. So the Psalmist can say, "My soul shall make her boast in the Lord." Wealth, social position, human ability, may fail us; but the Lord can be trusted at all times. Moreover, to glory in the Lord is to take ground on which all the saints can be together. At once, therefore, we read, "the humble shall hear thereof and be glad." An ignorant and unlearned man, like Peter, and a well-born and learned man, like Paul, find themselves on common ground, and on the highest ground, when both can say, "My soul shall make her boast in the Lord." To boast in poverty or ignorance would be mere affectation; to boast in wealth or learning would be mere vanity. It was not Peter that said he was "unlearned and ignorant"; nor was it Paul who said he had " much learning." Others said these things of these believers. Forgetting the things that are behind, they could say, "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord," and, so doing they found themselves together on common ground and are both taken up by the Lord for the highest form of service as Apostles.

(Psalms 34:3) It is this lowly spirit, that glories only in the Lord, that draws the saints together. So at once the Psalmist adds, "Oh magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together." The believer who boasts in his wealth, or intellect, or birth, is seeking to magnify himself, and in that measure divides the Lord’s people. How often division amongst the people of God can be traced to vainglory that seeks to magnify self. The disciples of the Lord fell out by the way through disputing among themselves as to who should be the greatest (Mark 34).

We thus learn that the humble spirit, that blesses the at all times, boasts only in the Lord, and exalts His name, will draw the saints to one another with the Lord as their gathering centre and bond of fellowship

(Psalms 34:4-7). Having presented the great theme of the Psalm in the first three verses, the Psalmist passes on to give the experience by which he learnt to bless the Lord at all times, and exalt His Name. This god-fearing man found himself in circumstances which filled him with foreboding fears (Psalms 34:4); his way seemed dark (5); and troubles accumulated (Psalms 34:6). Difficulties and wrongs pressed upon him. He was opposed by those whose hearts were

filled with enmity (Psalms 34:21), whose tongues spoke evil, and who sought to cover their evil with guile (Psalms 34:13). In these difficult circumstances he did not rise up in a spirit of pride and anger, and strive with his opponents. He did not seek to avenge himself, but, he says, "I sought the Lord." He confides all his exercises to the Lord, and spreads out his trials before Him.

He then tells us the result, for, he says, "The Lord delivered me from all my fears." The Lord gave him light for his path, and saved him out of "all his troubles." Moreover, he found that, though opposed by man, he was guarded by unseen angelic power. If then the Lord delivers this lowly man from "all" his fears, and "all" his troubles, he may well bless the Lord at "all times."

(Psalms 34:8-10) . Having experienced the goodness of the Lord the Psalmist calls his brethren to "taste and see that the Lord is good," and thus realise the blessedness of the man that trusts in the Lord, and walks in His fear. Such will find, in a world like this, that they may have many needs, but they will not want. The Psalmist had sought the Lord and had been blest; now he can say to others, "they that seek the Lord shall not want any good."

(Psalms 34:11-14). In the verses that follow there is set before us the path of quietness and peace through a restless and hostile world. Would we find "life" in the midst of a world of death, and "see good" though passing through a world of evil, then let us so walk in the fear of God that we keep our tongues from the evil that would slander or injure others, and our lips from speaking guile in the attempt to excuse ourselves. Let us depart from evil and do good, and, instead of striving with our opponents, let us seek peace and pursue it.

(Psalms 34:15-18). So walking we shall find that the eyes of the Lord are upon us and His ears are open to our cry. He is against them that do evil, but delivers the righteous out of all their troubles, and is nigh unto them of a broken heart and a contrite spirit. If our hearts are broken by all that is around, and our spirits contrite by reason of what we find in ourselves, we shall discover that it is still true that "the Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit."

(Psalms 34:19-20). Nevertheless, though there is a path of "life" and "good" for the godly, it is ever true that, in an evil world, the righteous will suffer. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous," but in their afflictions they will have the watchful care of the Lord. He delivers; He keeps His people from harm, for not one of their bones is broken. He will deal with all the wicked. He redeems the souls of His servants, and none that trust in Him will be left desolate. Thus learning the grace of the Lord in the midst of afflictions the soul may well say, "I WILL BLESS THE LORD AT ALL TIMES."

S. Brief Notes on the Epistle to Titus.

Brief Notes on the Epistle to Titus.

Introduction. The great subject of the Epistle to Titus is the maintenance of godliness, that becomes us as Christians, in our individual lives; in our earthly relationships, and in our attitude toward the world. In this Epistle the apostle does not unfold the order, and behaviour, that should mark us when come together in assembly, as in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, but instructs us as to the conduct that becomes us in our private lives. This is surely of the first importance, for it is possible to be exceedingly careful as to our outward demeanour when found together in assembly meetings, and yet careless as to our behaviour in the family circle, in business connections, and before the world. Carelessness in the private life will surely lead to hypocrisy that uses a fair profession in public to cover up a poor walk in private. To this carelessness in the private life, may we not trace much of the weakness that often marks the assemblies of God’s people, even if meeting according to Scriptural order? In the course of the Epistle, the apostle, again and again, insists on the connection between truth and godliness. If the truth is not maintained, godliness will surely fail; if godliness is not maintained the truth will fall into disrepute. Nevertheless, the apostle does not unfold the doctrine, nor is the maintenance of sound doctrine the leading subject, as in the Epistles to Timothy. He is rather pressing the importance of the right behaviour which is consistent with true doctrine. From the first chapter we learn the qualities that should mark those who undertake the care of God’s people, hold fast the truth, and rebuke the unruly. In the second chapter we have set forth the behaviour that becomes us as individuals, in the different relationships of life, and which is consistent with the grace of God by which we have been so richly blessed. From the third chapter we learn what is our right attitude, as Christians toward the world, in consistency with the kindness and love of God toward men.

Titus 1:1-16.

(Titus 1:1-4). The introductory verses are of the deepest importance, for in them the apostle briefly alludes to the great foundation truths of Christianity, which form the basis of our practical walk as believers; govern our individual life before God, as well as in our relations with one another, and our attitude toward the world. The apostle speaks of believers as "God’s elect." The election of God includes all the chosen of God, whether from among Jews or Gentiles, and thus takes us outside Judaism which recognises only those of Jewish descent. There follows a striking summary of the outstanding marks of God’s elect:

Firstly, such are marked by "faith" which is the door into all blessing (Acts 14:27), and brings the believer under the shelter of the work of Christ, and into relationship with God. It stands in contrast to a religious profession which consists in the performance of ceremonies, and submission to ordinances, that are possible to the unregenerate apart from faith in God.

Secondly, "the faith" of God’s elect, will lead to the acknowledgement of the truth, in contrast to mere speculations and reasonings of natural men, about the truth, by which they are not only

"never able to come to the knowledge of the truth," but are led to "resist the truth," and become "reprobate concerning the faith" (2 Timothy 3:7-8).

Thirdly, we are reminded that the truth will ever lead to a life of godliness, in contrast to error which leads to ungodliness. In writing to Timothy, the apostle warns him against those in the christian circle "who concerning the truth had erred:" of such he has to say, "they will increase unto more ungodliness" and "overthrow the faith of some" (2 Timothy 2:16-18). In this passage in Titus we have "faith," "truth," and "godliness" linked together. In Timothy we are warned that the overthrow of faith, error, and ungodliness are bound together.

Fourthly, the godliness, or "patient continuance in well doing" of the elect will lead to the sure and certain "hope of eternal life," when godliness will have its bright reward, in contrast to the portion of unbelievers who, by unrighteousness, are passing on to indignation and wrath (comp. Romans 2:6-8). The hopes of a Jew, or a man of the world, are limited to life in this world, and centre in earthly possessions, and worldly ease and prosperity. The Christian’s hope is connected with a life that is not dependent on the things of time, or of this world. Eternal life was promised before "the ages of time," and connects the believer with the counsels of God for eternity. As we pass through the world it enables us to enter into fellowship with God as the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3), and in its fulness will only be enjoyed in life’s eternal home. Therefore, while we have this life as a present possession, it can also be set before us as our hope.

Fifthly, the truth as to godliness, and our hope, has been manifested by God’s "word." Believers are not left to tradition and the reasonings of their own minds, but they have the authority of the unerring word of God for the assurance of the truths they believe.

Sixthly, the truth manifested in the word, has been made known to us by the "preaching" which had been specially committed to the apostle, with all the authority of God, for the Gentiles, and, as we know, to be continued by "faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2).

Seventhly, the apostle’s salutation indicates that if we are to acknowledge the truth, walk in the godliness that is consistent with it, have before us the blessed hope to which it leads, understand the word which unfolds the truth, and proclaim it to others, we shall each need, even as Titus, "grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour."

(Titus 1:5). Having brought before us the outstanding truths of the Christian faith, the apostle states the reasons that led him to write this Epistle. Titus had been left in Crete for a twofold purpose: first, to set in order certain things that were lacking in the assemblies in Crete; secondly, to appoint elders to maintain order. To carry out this service Paul writes to give Titus definite directions so that he may act with the authority of the apostle according to his instructions.

Today we have no apostles, and no apostolic delegates, to appoint elders, and for any to claim such authority would be mere pretension. It has been pointed out that there are no such directions in any of the epistles addressed to assemblies, clearly indicating that no authority has ever been given to assemblies to appoint elders or choose their own leaders. Nevertheless, we are surely to profit by these directions, and thus learn what are the qualities that still prove an individual brother fitted for watching over the interests of the Lord, and guiding others in the maintenance of order and godliness in local assemblies.

It will be noticed that it is not the possession of an eminent gift that fits a believer for such service, but rather moral qualifications. He is to be blameless, not only in his personal conduct, but in the circumstances of life both in the family circle, and in his relations with others. One has said, "While giving the evangelists and teachers their place, we should also value those who in a similar and less obtrusive way are devoting themselves day by day to strengthen the bonds of affection, and to repress the sources of disorder which, as we all know, continually spring up in christian assemblies" (W.K.).

(Titus 1:6). The one who would seek to maintain order in the house of God, must first show that he can maintain order in his own house. He must be blameless in his family relations — the husband of one wife, and his household free from all charge of riot and unruliness.

(Titus 1:7-8). Moreover, the one who would press godliness on others, must himself be marked by godliness. The apostle thus contrasts the ungodliness of the flesh — marked by self-will, passion, violence, and covetousness with godliness — marked by hospitality, the love of goodness, discretion, righteousness, piety, and temperance.

(Titus 1:9). Moreover, the one who would instruct others in the word, must himself hold fast "the faithful word" as he has been taught through "faithful men" (comp. 2 Timothy 2:1-2). "Holding fast the faithful word," will enable us, on the one hand, to encourage God’s people with sound doctrine, and on the other hand, to "refute gain-sayers." It is not the knowledge of error that will enable us to meet it, but the knowledge of the truth — "holding fast the faithful word." We need to be "wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil" (Romans 16:19).

(Titus 1:10-11). In contrast to those who hold fast the truth revealed in the "faithful word," that leads to godliness, there were men, in those early days, who were "vain talkers," teaching error, and thus deceiving their hearers, and leading to ungodliness among the people of God by subverting whole houses. Such were actuated by the low motive of base gain. These false teachers were especially found amongst the Jews who opposed the truth by seeking to lead Christians back to a religion of outward forms and ceremonies in temple worship, that appeals to the flesh. When here, the Lord exposed the leaders of a corrupted Judaism, as being hypocrites who honoured God with their lips, but with a heart far from Him and who had turned the House of God into a den of thieves. The flesh does not alter, and thus christian assemblies are faced with the danger of linking with a profession of Christianity the outward forms of the circumcision, which ends in using a religious profession as a means of gain.

(Titus 1:12-14). We further learn that in seeking to maintain order and godliness in the assemblies of God’s people, we have to take into account the different characteristics of people formed by their particular circumstances and nationalities, which may lead to the flesh showing itself in special evils. The circumstances of the Cretians made them particularly liable to deceitfulness, laziness and gluttony — characteristics to which one of their own prophets had drawn attention. Such manifestations of the flesh, so contrary to godliness, called for severe rebuke, in order that they might be "sound in the faith," and thus preserved from Jewish fables, and the commandments of men that would turn from the truth.

(Titus 1:15-16). To turn back to false teaching, and make a religious profession for false gain, is to open the door to all the natural tendencies of the flesh, and thus lead to ungodliness. Souls would

thus become defiled in "mind and conscience." This leads to the terrible condition in which a profession of God is linked up with works that are a practical denial of God. In the sight of God, such professors are "abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work found worthless." Is not this a solemn picture of Christendom in these last days that has the "form of godliness, but denying the power thereof?" (2 Timothy 3:5.)

Titus 2:1-15.

(Titus 2:1). In the second chapter we have brought before us the godliness that is consistent with, and the outcome of, sound doctrine to which the apostle refers in verses 1, 7 and 10. The behaviour, of which the apostle speaks, is that which becomes Christians in their individual and private lives in relation with one another. We thus learn that Christianity affects the smallest details of the every-day life, and that sound doctrine will lead to a godly life in every stage, and relationship, of our path on earth.

(Titus 2:2). In aged men, godliness will be manifested by sober mindedness, gravity of manner, discretion in words and acts, and soundness in the faith, in love and in patience.

(Titus 2:3). The aged women are to be marked by behaviour that becomes those who have to say to sacred things. By reason of their age and experience of life they will probably have a large acquaintance with others; let them beware lest such knowledge becomes an occasion for slander. Their age and infirmity may necessitate the use of a stimulant, but let them beware of becoming enslaved to much wine. By reason of their age and experience they should be able to teach what is right and good, and thus in a special way admonish the younger women.

(Titus 2:4-5). The younger women should be attached to their husbands and children. Discreet in their words and actions; chaste in their dress and deportment; diligent in home work; good, and subject to their husbands, so that nothing in their lives may give occasion for the word of God being brought into contempt.

(Titus 2:6-8). Young men are to be discreet in their words and ways. Titus, himself, being a young man, is especially exhorted to act in a way that would be a pattern for the young men, both in good works and in doctrine. Again we learn how intimately the life and the doctrine are connected. On the one hand, if the life is not right, the teaching, however correct, will have no power; on the other hand, let us beware of being content with good living while indifferent to sound teaching. In doctrine we are to avoid any perversion that would tend to corrupt the truth. Further in teaching we are to maintain gravity and thus avoid all extravagancies of manner that would bring the teaching into contempt. Moreover, we are to be careful to use "sound speech," and beware of using words and expressions current in the world but entirely out of place in divine things, and that would lead to the teaching being condemned. Acting in the light of these exhortations, those who seek to oppose would be silenced, having no evil thing to say of us.

(Titus 2:9-10). The christian servant (or "bondman") should be marked by obedience, and carry out his duties in a way that would commend him to his earthly master. This would involve that they refrain from contradicting their masters, or robbing them, but, on the contrary show all faithfulness. Thus, while acting rightly to their earthly masters, they would in all things adorn the teaching "which is of our Saviour God." In the closing verses of the chapter we have a striking summary of the doctrines of Christianity that lead to the life of godliness. The world can, in measure, recognise

and appreciate the right conduct to which we are exhorted in the first part of the chapter, but it knows nothing of the working of grace in the souls of believers, of which the apostle speaks in the closing portion. The current religion of the day is ready to preach morality and right conduct, but ignores the grace of God which alone is the true source of all godliness. How important then to have our souls established in the grace of God, without which morality will yield no lasting blessing.

(Titus 2:11). At once the apostle brings before us "the grace of God" as the foundation of all our christian blessing. We learn that grace brings blessing to us: teaches us how to live in the present world (verse 12); and gives us to look for a blessed hope in the future (verse 13). Seeing that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, we should hardly be surprised if the judgment of God had appeared. But the amazing fact is that the first appearing of the Lord Jesus has brought the grace of God into the world; for, while the law came by Moses, grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. Again we read, "God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 1:17; John 3:17). Moreover, if "all the world" is "guilty before God," this grace of God, that brings salvation hath appeared "for all men" (N. Tn.).

Directly we open the New Testament, we are face to face with the blessed fact that the time had come, in the history of this ruined and guilty world, when God had intervened for the salvation of men through the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, for we read, "Thou shalt call His name JESUS (1:e., Saviour) for He shall save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). In order that this salvation might be available for all, Christ Jesus "gave Himself a ransom for all" (1 Timothy 2:4-6). When ascended to glory, the message is still that there is no salvation in any other, "For there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). So, from the birth of Christ to His ascension, we see set forth in Him the grace of God that brings salvation for all men.

(Titus 2:12). If the grace of God brings salvation for all men, it also teaches those who receive the blessing through faith in Christ how to live a consistent life. So far from grace leading us to be indifferent as to our walk, it will lead, not only to the denial of ungodliness and worldly lusts, but, to a life marked by sobriety as regards ourselves, righteousness in our relations with others, and piety in relation to God. So living, the Christian will be a true witness to the grace of God "in the present course of things" that, alas! is marked by ungodliness and lust.

Sobriety will deliver us from having inflated ideas of our own importance, and lead to a sober estimate of ourselves in the presence of God. If living righteously we shall give to all their rights. Living piously we shall act in a spirit of reverence that walks in secret before God, and in the confidence of faith, brings everything to God. It is the opposite of the sanctimoniousness that leads to wearing a religious garb, the making of long prayers in public, and mere outward display, in order to gain a religious reputation before men. Characterised by sobriety, righteousness, and piety, the believer would be preserved from all eccentricities, and would present a well-balanced life, that would become a witness to the grace of God.

(Titus 2:13). Moreover, grace begun on earth will lead to glory. It gives us a blessed hope beyond this present age, with all its violence and corruption, that will be introduced by the "appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ." At His first appearing we saw "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye

through His poverty might be rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). At His second appearing we shall see "the glory" of Christ. At His first appearing, in His lowly grace, He became a homeless stranger in His own creation, with not where to lay His head. At His second appearing He will be manifested in glory as "the blessed and only ruler, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords" (1 Timothy 6:14-15). When He appears in glory, believers will be with Him, and like Him, and perfectly at home with Him, for the grace that brings salvation fits us for the glory. If grace makes us strangers in this world, it makes us at home in the glory of the world to come.

(Titus 2:14). This blessed Person — Who is indeed "the great God," and yet our Saviour, the Man Christ Jesus — Who will come in glory to deal with all the wicked in judgment, is the One of Whom the believer can say, "He gave Himself for us," to "redeem us from all lawlessness," in order to secure for Himself a people exclusively for Himself, who will be zealous for the good works that will mark the life of godliness to which grace leads. He has thus established a claim upon us — a claim of love — that we should be for His pleasure. Christ has died for us, that henceforth we should not live unto ourselves, but unto Him that died for us and rose again (2 Corinthians 5:15). No one has such a claim upon us as Christ, for, as one has asked, "Who in this world, the nearest or dearest, ever gave himself for you?" To live for His pleasure will set us free from all lawlessness.

(Titus 2:15). Already the apostle has exhorted Titus to speak "the things which become sound doctrine," and now again he not only instructs him to speak of these things, and thus expound them, but to "exhort" his hearers to carry them out, and, if necessary "rebuke" any opposition to them. He was not to be hindered, if any man sought to pour contempt upon him, because he was a young man.

Titus 3:1-15.

Having been instructed as to the behaviour that becomes us in our relations with one another, we are now reminded of the conduct that should mark Christians in reference to the world we are passing through.

(Titus 3:1-2). As the elect of God we are called out of this world to share in the blessed hope of the coming glory of our Saviour Jesus Christ. As strangers in this world, it is no part of our responsibility to interfere with its government. Whatever the character of the worldly powers our place is to be subject, and obedient to rule. Whatever evil may mark their works, our place is to be ready to every good work. Whatever the character of the rulers, themselves, we are to refrain from speaking evil of any man. Whatever violence or injustice we may have to meet, our place is to act in a spirit of gentleness and meekness that refuses to insist upon our rights.

We know that it is not always easy to act in this spirit, for naturally violence, injustice and insult, stir up resentment in our hearts, leading to revengeful thoughts, if not angry denunciations, and the effort to avenge ourselves (Romans 12:18-19).

(Titus 3:3). To enable us to refuse the tendencies of the flesh, and act according to these exhortations we are reminded of two truths:

First, if we find it difficult to meet evil with good, violence with gentleness, and insults with meekness, let us remember that we, ourselves, were once ignorant of the grace of God, and, in those days, we, like the world, were marked by disobedience, deceit, lust, malice and envy. This

being so, it surely becomes us to meet in a spirit of gentleness and meekness, the evils in others, of which we ourselves were once guilty. To act otherwise, would only be to fall back into acting in the flesh by meeting evil with evil.

(Titus 3:4-7). Secondly, as a yet greater incentive to act in the spirit of grace towards others, we are reminded of the kindness and love in which God has acted towards men, and the mercy which has saved us from the judgment we deserve. If then God in His mercy has saved us from the world and its evils, it becomes us to show kindness and mercy to others as we pass through the world.

Let us remember that we were not saved by any meritorious works that we have done, but through the mercy of God. Not only are we saved from judgment, but a new life has been imparted to us, and the Holy Spirit given to us to live this new life. By this new life lived in the power of the Holy Spirit, we are cleansed from the old life with its ignorance, lust, malice, and envy. We are thus washed with the cleansing that will mark the regeneration, when in the days of the Kingdom all will be made new. If we are saved from the world, and cleansed from the old life, it is in view of the glorious inheritance to come, in which eternal life in all its fulness will be enjoyed.

(Titus 3:8). The word by which these great truths are made known to us is faithful. Therefore, we can with all confidence affirm these things, and exhort those who have believed to maintain the conduct that is consistent with them. These things: the grace of God, the conduct to which it leads, and the hope that it gives, are good and profitable unto men.

(Titus 3:9). If there are things to affirm which are good and profitable, there are also things to avoid. There is the danger of the mind being occupied with "foolish questions," with genealogies, contentions and strivings about the law. Such things are unprofitable and vain.

(Titus 3:10-11). Moreover, there are not only certain things to be avoided, but there may also be persons that we should reject, or "have done with." An "heretic" is not necessarily one that teaches false doctrine. In the Scriptural meaning of the word he is one who makes a party to uphold certain views. If deaf to a first and second admonition, it is evident that he is perverted from the path in which we are called to walk, and having refused all admonition, we are to refrain from further intercourse with him.

(Titus 3:12-13). The epistle closes with a glimpse of the godly care that should exist among the saints in reference to the Lord’s servants, and those who devote themselves to the ministry. The apostle desires the company of Titus, but seeing the need in Crete, he instructs him not to leave until Artemas and Tychicus arrive in the island. He desires also that believers should continue in their temporal work, not only to meet their necessary wants, but also to enable them to help in meeting the necessities of the Lord’s servants, and thus bring forth fruit that would abound to their account (Php 4:17-18). H. Smith.

Before the perfume could rise to God for a sweet smelling savour, the incense had to be beaten very small, and laid upon the coals of the altar (Exodus 30:1-38, Leviticus 16:1-34). The prayers of believers, the product of their diverse trials and sorrows, are a sweet savour to God. David says, "Let my prayer be set forth before Thee as incense, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice" (Revelation 5:8; Psalms 141:2). From the German.

S. Christian Experience.

Christian Experience.

Hamilton Smith. The Epistle to the Philippians is the Epistle of Christian experience, for therein is presented in a very touching way the experience of a believer that lives the Christian life in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Though written by the Apostle Paul, he does not speak of his apostleship, nor does he address the Philippian Assembly as an Apostle, but as a servant of Jesus Christ. Nor does he speak of gifts and powers that alone belong to an Apostle, but rather of experiences that are possible for every Christian. Thus, as we read the Epistle, each one can say, "This is the experience that is possible for me to enjoy if I live the Christian life in the power of the Holy Spirit."

Moreover, the blessed experiences brought before us, are entirely independent of circumstances, be they bright or sad. When the Apostle wrote the Epistle his circumstances were sorrowful and heart breaking. He, himself, had been a prisoner four years. He knew that within the Christian circle there were some who were taking up the service of the Lord, and preaching Christ, even of envy and strife, supposing to add to his afflictions (Php 1:15-16); outside the Christian circle there were adversaries plotting for his life (Php 1:28). Such was the state of the Christian profession, that he has to say, "All seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's" (Php 2:21); and the walk of many was so low that, instead of being witnesses to Christ and His work, they had become "enemies of the cross of Christ."

Such were the circumstances: Paul a prisoner; inside the Christian circle envy, strife, and contention; all seeking their own, and many walking as enemies of the cross: outside the Christian circle, adversaries, dogs, and evil workers.

Nevertheless, in the midst of these distressing circumstances the Apostle enjoys the most blessed Christian experience.

He has deep and continual joy in the Lord, and in everything that is of the Lord in the saints (Php 3:1, Php 3:3; Php 4:4, Php 4:10). His confidence is unshaken in the Lord. He boasts in Christ Jesus and has no confidence in the flesh (Php 1:6; Php 3:3; Php 4:13).

He is kept in a peace that passeth all understanding (Php 4:7). His love flows out of the saints and appreciates their love to him (Php 1:8; Php 3:1; Php 1:17). His hope is undimmed as he looks for the Lord Jesus to come from heaven (Php 3:20). His faith trusts the Lord in whatsoever state he may be found (Php 4:12-13).

What then is the secret of such blessed experiences in the midst of such distressing circumstances? In one word it is CHRIST. All the experiences that pass before us in the Epistle are the result of a believer having Christ before the soul. The Apostle sees clearly that Christ is in the presence of God to represent believers; and that believers are left here, for a time, to represent Christ. He sees that Christ is our righteousness before God and the prize at the end of the journey,

and he has only Christ before him every step of the way. For him it was Christ, "whether it be by life or death." Having Christ before him he enjoyed all the blessed experiences of which he speaks in the Epistle, and in order that we may enjoy these experiences he sets Christ before us.

Firstly, CHRIST our life (Php 1:20-21).

Secondly, CHRIST our Pattern (Php 2:5).

Thirdly, CHRIST in glory our Object (Php 3:13-14).

Fourthly, CHRIST our Hope (Php 3:20-21).

Fifthly, CHRIST our strength (Php 4:13).

1. CHRIST OUR LIFE (Php 1:20-21). In all truth Paul could say, "For me to live is Christ." Christ was all in his life. If he lived it was by Christ and for Christ. If death was his portion, he would die for Christ. Over such a Christian adversaries had no power, Satan no point of attack, and death no terror. The malice of envious brethren could not move him, and the low walk of those who were minding earthly things only drew forth his tears. Self being gone as a motive, insults and desertions called forth no bitterness and rancour; circumstances, however trying, drew forth no complaint. His one object was not to defend or exalt himself, or to decry and belittle others, but, in all circumstances, whether in life or death, to magnify Christ.

2. CHRIST OUR PATTERN (Php 2:3-5). In Php 2:1-30, Christ is looked at, not as going up to glory, but, as coming down to the cross; and we see the lowly mind that marked Him in every step that led to the cross. Thus Christ, in all the lowly grace of His path from the glory to the cross, is presented as our perfect pattern to produce in us a life of lowly grace. The flesh in us is vain-glorious; and the effort to exalt self often leads to the belittling of others. This vanity ever leads to strife. So we read of the disciples, "there was a strife among them," because they each wanted to be accounted the greatest (Luke 22:24). And how often, since that day, the root of strife amongst the people of God has been that someone wanted to be great. But, says the Apostle, "Let nothing be done through strife and vain glory: but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves." We may think this difficult at times, for as one has said, ’We may see great vanity or pride in another, and one may be going on really better than this or that person;" but if close to Christ, however comparatively well we may be walking, we shall feel in His presence our own nothingness, and see our brother in Christ, and all that is of Christ in him, rather than his faults. Then it will not be difficult for each to esteem other better than themselves. The Apostle, then, would have us to be of one mind (Php 2:2); the one mind that he desires us to have is the lowly mind (Php 2:3); and the lowly mind has been perfectly set forth in Christ (Php 2:5). The mind of Christ would deliver us from all the self-importance of the flesh, and lead each to esteem himself the least of all.

We need the mind of Christ if we are to exhibit the lowly grace of Christ. It is possible to affect a lowly manner, and use humble words before men; but, if the grace of Christ is to be seen in us we shall need the lowly mind that was in Christ. Thus the Apostle turns our eyes upon Christ. Devoted saints may help us by their lives, their ministry, and their means, but only Christ can be the perfect pattern for the Christian’s walk. In all His perfect path He was the exact contrast to all that the flesh is. He made Himself of no reputation; the flesh in us would seek to make a reputation for itself, if

not in the world, in the religious circle. He took upon Him the form of a servant; but the flesh in us likes to be served. He humbled Himself; the flesh in us likes to exalt itself. He was obedient to the will of another; we like to do our own wills. In Christ we see the perfect love that made itself nothing in order to serve others. Love delights to serve; self likes to be served, and thinks itself exalted when others are waiting upon it. Walking in the spirit of Christ, vain glory would be gone, and the lowly grace of Christ would be expressed.

Win lowliness of heart, and having won beware; And that thou grow not proud of lowliness have care.

3. CHRIST OUR OBJECT (Php 3:13-14).

If the second chapter has brought Christ before us in His lowly path, as the pattern for our walk, Php 3:1-21 presents Christ in glory as the One to whom we are pressing on. God sets before us Christ in glory as the perfect Object of our souls, and tells us that we are called on high to be with Him and like Him. With this bright prospect before us, we can forget the things that are behind, rise above the sorrows of the present, and reach forth to those things that are before. In the light of the eternal glory that lies before us, present things lose their value, and the sorrows by the way are seen to be but for a moment. Compared with the coming glory the things which are gain in the flesh are counted by the Apostle not only as valueless, but as dung. Having seen their worthlessness, he not only leaves them behind, but, he forgets them. He says, as it were, "They are not worth talking about, even to condemn: I forget them." (Php 2:13).

Christ had laid hold of Paul for the express purpose of having the Apostle like Him and with Him in the glory, and Paul says, "The one thing I desire is to lay hold of Christ in glory — the prize that awaits me at the end of the journey."

Blessed for all believers to know, young and old, that if we have not yet laid hold of Christ in the glory, Christ has laid hold of us, and He which hath begun a good work will perform it unto the end. No matter how rough the road, how many the trials, how deep the sorrows, how powerful the enemy, Christ will not let us go. He is "able even to subdue all things unto Himself," so will at last have us like Him and with Him in the glory. And is it so! we shall be like Thy Son, Is this the grace which He for us has won?

Father of glory, thought beyond all thought, In glory, to His own blest likeness brought.

4. CHRIST OUR HOPE (Php 3:20-21). The Apostle looks up to heaven and sees Christ in the glory, and realises that believers are going to be conformed to the image of His Son in glory. It is possible to walk as He walked and, in this sense to be morally like Christ even now, but, to be conformed to His image we must wait for the coming glory. We are still in these bodies of humiliation, subject to sickness, and want, and exposed to dangers, and death.

How then are we to be delivered from these bodies of humiliation? We look at Christ in heaven and we see we are going to be like Him: our conversation — the home of our affections — is in heaven, and to heaven we look for the change of these bodies. "From whence also," writes the Apostle, "we look for the Lord Jesus Christ, as Saviour who shall transform our body of humiliation into conformity to His body of glory."

Once, He came as Saviour to deliver us from our sins, and judgment, by His death on the cross. A second time He is coming as Saviour to deliver us from these bodies of humiliation.

One thing remains to effect this great change — the coming of Christ. Christ is our hope, and at His coming what we have looked forward to in hope will be accomplished in glory. In the twinkling of an eye we shall be like Christ and with Christ.

One moment here, the next with Thee in bliss, Oh, what a glorious prospect, Lord is this!

Changed in a moment, from the flesh set free, Caught up together with Thyself to be.

5. CHRIST OUR STRENGTH (Php 4:12-13).

It is blessed to look back and see the grace of Christ in His lowly life. It is blessed to look up, and see Christ in the glory, as the one glorious Object before our souls. It is blessed to look on, and see that Christ is coming to conform us to His image. Nevertheless, as we look around we are faced with the circumstances by the way — prosperous circumstances that may make us careless and self-satisfied, or trying circumstances by which we may be cast down and dissatisfied. How then can we be lifted above our circumstances, be they bright or sad? To answer this question, the Apostle gives us his own experience. He had known what it was to be in want as well as in prosperity: he had been full, and he had hungered; he had enjoyed plenty and he had suffered need. But in all circumstances he had found his support in Christ. So he could write, "I have strength for all things in Him that giveth me power." In circumstances of weakness the Lord had said to him, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). Therefore Paul had learned, in whatsoever state he was, to be content. That Christ was his strength, was not merely an absolute truth to which he assented, but a truth that he had learned by experience. Through the strength of Christ he was made superior to all circumstances, be they bright or sad.

We may say Christ can do this for all saints, and it is true. But Paul says, as it were, "He has done it for me, for I have learnt by experience that I can do all things through Christ which strengthened me."

Thus, with Christ before his soul as his life, his Pattern, his Object, his hope, and his strength, the Apostle entered into all the blessed experiences that are proper to a Christian in the power of the Holy Spirit, and this in spite of so much in his circumstances that was sorrowful and heart breaking.

Seeing that Christ remains, and that Christ is the Same (Hebrews 1:11-12), it is still possible, amidst the gathering gloom of these closing days, for the simplest believer to enjoy this same true Christian experience — this joy in the Lord, confidence in the Lord, peace in the midst of trials, love that flows out to the saints, hope that looks for the coming of Christ, and faith that counts upon His support to lift us above every trial by the way.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus, Look full in His wonderful face: And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, In the light of His glory and grace.

Chapter 11

S. Come"; "Take"; "Learn

"Come"; "Take"; "Learn."

Matthew 11:25-30.

There are certain passages in the Word of God that are especially endeared to the hearts of all that love our Lord Jesus, inasmuch as they very definitely set forth the loveliness of Christ. Among such portions we may well include the six closing verses of Matthew 11:1-30, for in these verses we see the perfection of Christ shining out in one of the darkest moments of His earthly pathway. The passage opens with the words, "At that time." We may well pause to enquire, what was "that time"? The preceding chapters bring before us the Lord's ministry in the midst of Israel. He had presented Himself in all the glory of His Person as Emmanuel — God with us — cleansing the leper with a touch, healing the centurion's servant with a word, and commanding the demons to depart (8). He had revealed the grace of His heart in forgiving sins, in sitting down to eat with sinners, in raising the dead, opening the eyes of the blind, and in making the dumb to speak. He had revealed the tender love of His heart by suffering in His spirit the sorrows that He took away by His power, and had expressed His compassions for those who were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd. He had shown the lowly grace of His heart by entering the humble home of a fisherman, by preaching the gospel to the poor, and by becoming so poor that He had nowhere to lay His head.

What response did the nation give to the One who expressed His grace by becoming poor in order to show forth His love and power on behalf of sinful men in relieving them of every sorrow and pressure, even of death itself?

Alas! some besought Him to depart; others said "This man blasphemeth." Again there were those who laughed Him to scorn; others said He was a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber. The leaders said "He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils." They insulted Him, defamed Him, and thus speaking and acting against Him, they fulfilled His own touching words, "They have rewarded Me evil for good, and hatred for my love" (Psalms 109:5). It thus becomes clear that "that time" was the time of His utter rejection by the nation of Israel. This then was the answer the nation gave to all His love and grace. But what answer did the Lord give to all the insults and scorn that men heaped upon Him? Did He assert His sovereign rights, and fall back upon His royal power by which He could have silenced every opposer and crushed every foe? He had, indeed, warned the nation of the judgment that would overtake them, but He utters no word of resentment, He uses no threats, He is not moved to any act of revenge. In like spirit, a little later, in the last closing scenes, in the presence of false witnesses, "Jesus held His peace." Before Pilate, when accused by the chief priests, "He answered him to never a word"; and yet again, before the mocking Herod, "He answered him nothing."

If then He was silent, if He took no revenge upon His enemies, was it that He had no resource? Far from it; but His resource was not to vilify His enemies and turn upon His foes, but to turn to the

Father in prayer. As He can say, "For my love they are my adversaries; but I give myself unto prayer" (Psalms 109:4). So Peter can write of the Lord, in his Epistle, "Who when He was reviled, reviled not again: when He suffered He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously." The answer then to all the insults men heaped upon Him is seen in the threefold perfection that it called forth from the Lord.

First, "that time" brought to light His perfect and unshaken confidence in the Father's love. He finds His resource in turning in prayer to the Father — the One who loves Him, and who has all power as the Lord of heaven and earth. No circumstances, however terrible, are allowed for one moment to call in question the Father's love, or the power of the Lord of heaven and earth. Nor does the Lord turn to the Father, calling for revenge upon His enemies, but with thanks that, in spite of all the hatred and opposition of men and devils, divine love and divine power are carrying out the Father's purposes. These counsels of love pass by those who by their wisdom know not God, and proclaim the gospel to the poor who have no resources, and make known the Father to the babes who make no pretension.

Moreover, a second great perfection comes to light. With perfect confidence in the Father's love and power, the Lord perfectly submits to the Father's will. Thus He can say, "Even so Father: for so it seemed good in Thy sight." If carrying out the Father's will entails the hatred and scorn of men, He will submit. A little later, Peter, in his fleshly zeal, may draw a sword to resist those who oppose His Master; but, the Lord, Himself, can say, "Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it"? (John 18:11).

Furthermore, the sorrowful circumstances bring into prominence a third perfection of the Lord, for He can say, "I am meek and lowly in heart." In perfect meekness He gave way rather than assert His rights, and in perfect lowliness He refused to exalt Himself. As He passed through this world he ignored self in order to serve others in love.

Thus the darkest moment of His pathway becomes the occasion of bringing into display the moral excellencies of Christ, as seen in His perfect confidence in the Father's love; His perfect submission to the Father's will, and the meekness and lowliness of heart that could think of everything, and everyone but self.

Thus, in a threefold way the loveliness of Christ shines forth. If, however, we are to profit by Christ as our perfect pattern it will not be enough to admire His excellencies, we must also give heed to His three exhortations: First, "Come unto Me"; Secondly, "Take my yoke," and, Thirdly, "Learn of Me."

"Come unto Me." Israel's rejection of Christ cannot stay the grace of God: indeed, it becomes the occasion for that grace to flow out to all, Jew and Gentile alike. Therefore the Lord can say, "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden." However great the burden of sins we are welcome to come, even as the woman who was a sinner found in the house of Simon, and as a poor thief found when nailed on a cross. As another has written, it is as if the Lord said, "If you are a poor woman, not fit to face any of your fellow creatures, come to Me; I will have you, trust Me: if you are hanging on a cross for your crimes, you shall go up today with Me to paradise. My blood is enough to put your crimes away: my heart is open to receive you." Weary with our vain efforts to meet our condition, and burdened with our sins, how good to hear His words of love, "Come unto

Me," and, in His presence, discover that He knows the worst about us, and yet He loves us. Then to learn that loving us He has died for us, and that the holy God is so satisfied with what Christ has done that He has raised Him from the dead and seated Him in the glory, and that the one that believes in Him is justified from all things, and is as clear of the judgment that his sins deserve as Christ, Himself, in the glory. Thus it is He brings peace to the conscience, and we realise the truth of His words, "I will give you rest."

"Take My yoke." The yoke implies service taken up in submission to the will of another. With our natural tendency to self-importance we may seek to be among the Lord's people as those that rule and exercise lordship, but He could say, "1 am among you as He that serveth." Moreover, it is not service according to our own wills, or doing what we think best; but service according to His thoughts and in obedience to His will. It is not simply "a yoke" that we are asked to take, but "His yoke." Coming to Him as needy sinners He will give us rest; taking His yoke as believers we shall find rest. Martha, who served the Lord according to her thoughts was distracted and "cumbered about much serving."

"Learn of Me." If, then, our service is to be according to His will and pleasure we shall need to remember the Lord's third great exhortation, "Learn of Me." This involves, not only that we learn the service He would have us to take up, but that we learn His blessed character, so that we not only do the right thing, but we do it in the right spirit. Therefore the Lord's desire is first, that we should take up His service in submitting to His yoke; secondly, that we should exhibit His character as the One Who is "meek and lowly in heart."

We can learn of one another; we can learn by the prayerful study of the word; but to learn of Him implies that we are in His presence and keep His company. As the Lord could say a little later, "If any man serve Me, let him follow Me" (John 12:26). It is not, indeed, that He will give us any fresh revelation beyond that which is made known to us in the word; but, in His presence we learn the blessed reality of all that the word reveals. Paul can write to Timothy, "Consider what 1 say: and the Lord will give thee understanding" (2 Timothy 2:7). An Apostle may be used to reveal the truth, but the Lord alone can give understanding of the truth revealed. It is good indeed to have the doctrine set forth with all the authority of God's written word; but good, also, when the written word turns us to the living Word to see the truth set forth in all its perfection in HIM. In His Person there is brought before us, in a way that must deeply affect us, all the moral excellencies and spiritual graces that marked every step of His path of devoted service. We look up to Him in the glory as our object and our hope, but we look back to His perfect pathway to learn in Him the spirit that should mark His people as they pass through this world. In Him we see our perfect example, for He was "meek and lowly in heart." It is still possible, like Mary of old, to sit at His feet and hear His word, and learning of Him we shall catch something of His spirit and express something of His lovely character. It has been truly said, "There is so much Christian service in the world which lacks true strength and beauty, because it stands too little connected with the source of all service, with Christ Himself, and is too little founded on the word of God. There are so many believers who like Martha, are busied about many things, but alas! have neither the desire, nor quietness enough, to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to His precious word. To spend an hour alone with the Lord would be to them far more difficult than to labour the whole day about all sorts of things. And whence comes this? It demands a far more spiritual mind to tarry in His presence than to be occupied with service. In the latter even nature can find some satisfaction, while in His presence it

must be entirely set aside."

Furthermore, if we learn of Him, we shall not only take up His service in His spirit, but, in the presence of all the sorrows and trials of life, the desertions and disappointments, the insults and malice we may have to meet, we shall act as He acted. We shall not allow any of these things to call in question the Father’s love, but, like Christ, we shall make them the occasion of turning to the Father in prayer, of confiding in the Father’s love, and submitting to the Father’s will. In the spirit of meekness we shall be quiet in the presence of every insult. With the lowly mind we shall refuse to exalt self and seek, rather, to ignore self while seeking to serve others in love. Thus acting like the Master we shall find rest to our souls.

Then seek to please Him, whatsoever He bids thee, Whether to do, to suffer, or be still;

’Twill matter little by what path He leads us, If in it all we sought to do His will.

H. Smith.

S. Comfort in Trial and Help in Trouble.

Comfort in Trial and Help in Trouble.

Psalms 36:1-12 and Psalms 46:1-11.

Hamilton Smith.

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It is impossible for a god-fearing man to pass through an evil world without meeting trials and afflictions. The devil seeks to engross the believer with the trials, to bring in distance between the soul and God. Faith uses the trial as an occasion for turning to God, and thus, not only triumphs over the enemy, but, gets blessing in and through the trial. In Psalms 36:1-12 we have the experience of one who is faced with severe trial, but in turning to God finds deep comfort and great blessing in the trial.

(Psalms 36:1-4). The first four verses describe the trial. The servant of God is faced with an enemy who acts in such an evil way that it is evident he has no conscience toward God — "there is no fear of God before his eyes."

Moreover, his enemy is so blinded by his own vanity that, even when his iniquity is thoroughly exposed and found to be hateful, he flatters himself that he is in the right.

Further, in his effort to prove himself right he falls back on guile and, with words of deceit, seeks to cover his iniquity. In malice he devises mischief, and is so lost to a true sense of right and wrong that he ceases to abhor evil.

Thus the godly man is faced with a conscienceless opponent, whose vanity will admit no wrong, who uses guile in his effort to cover his evil and who is in fact a malicious mischief-maker.

(Psalms 36:5-7). In the presence of this great trial the god-fearing man does not take the smallest step to injure his enemy, or call down vengeance upon him. He finds consolation in turning to the Lord, and counting upon His mercy and faithfulness.

God’s mercy can shelter from all the malice of man, and His faithfulness will deal with all the evil. There is, then, no need for the god-fearing man to take up his own cause; his part is simply to commit himself to God, and leave all in His hands.

God’s mercy is in the heavens, and His faithfulness reaches unto the clouds. Both are out of reach of the malicious devices of the wicked. Trusting God, and spreading out all our trials before Him, we shall find shelter from the malice of men under the shadow of His wings.

(Psalms 36:8-9). Having found comfort and rest in the midst of trial, the soul is set free to enjoy the positive blessings that God has for His people. He learns that those who put their trust in God, not only find shelter under the shadow of God’s wings, but that they will be abundantly satisfied with

the fatness of God’s house. There are joys and pleasures that belong to the dwelling place of God, whatever form that house may take in the different dispensations. In God’s house, man, and his malice, are forgotten, and everything speaks of God and His glory; so, in another Psalm, we read, "In His temple doth every one speak of His glory" (Psalms 29:9). For the Christian the Father’s house is where Christ has gone, that home on which no shadow of death will ever come, where nothing that defiles can enter, where love and holiness fill the scene. It is our privilege to find our joy and satisfaction in looking on to the fulness of blessing in the Father’s house where we shall be holy and without blame before God in love.

Moreover, if God gives us to feed on the fatness of His house, He also gives us to drink of the river of His pleasures. Does not this figure of speech speak of the eternal counsels of God Settled before the foundation of the world, which no evil of man, nor failure of the saints, can touch? Through all dispensations, God, in spite of all the power of the enemy and the evil of men, is carrying out his pleasure to have a people for His own glory, by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages world without end. This river of God’s pleasure flows from eternity to eternity, and our souls are given to drink of its blessedness as we pass through time.

Furthermore, with God is "the fountain of life." Life is the enjoyment of the relationships in which God has set the believer with Himself — the living enjoyment of His favour. God, Himself, is the source of this life, and it is our happy portion to live the life by walking in communion with God in the enjoyment of this favour.

Finally, the Psalmist says, "In thy light we shall see light." Amidst the difficulties of this world the way may often seem dark, but God gives us light, and in His light we shall find light for every step of the path.

Thus, the godly man having committed himself, and his trials, to God finds shelter under the shadow of God’s wings; satisfaction in the fatness of God’s house; refreshment in the river of God’s pleasure; favour and joy in the fountain of life, and light in the midst of the prevailing darkness.

(Psalms 36:10-12). In the enjoyment of these blessings the soul again expresses its confidence in the loving-kindness and righteousness of God. Those that know God and walk uprightly, can count upon God to uphold them, while the proud and the wicked will finally fall to rise no more.

Two truths of great practical importance, for believers of every dispensation, are brought before us in Psalms 46:1-11. In the presence of the upheavals and conflicts of a godless world, we are reminded, first, that God is "a very present help in trouble." Secondly, in order to realise, and obtain, the present help of God, our part is to "be still" and know that God is God (Psalms 46:1 and Psalms 46:10). Only faith can enter into these truths. Flesh can lean upon an arm of flesh; but flesh can neither trust in God, nor "be still" and wait for God to act.

Psalms 46:1 presents the great theme of the Psalm — God, our refuge, strength, and present help in trouble.

Psalms 46:2-3 the trouble and confusion of the world through which we are passing.

Psalms 46:4-11, the means whereby God sustains the faith of His people so that they are enabled to "be still" and prove God to be "a very present help."

(Psalms 46:1). We do well to notice the little word "our" in the opening verse. It is true that God is a refuge; but believers can say, "God is our refuge." The world has those to whom it looks for protection, and guidance, in the time of trouble. Believers have in God their refuge from the storms and distresses of life. Moreover, God is our "strength" in weakness, and "a very present help in trouble." The better and more exact translation is, "a help in distresses very readily found." To realise, however, that God is "a very present help," calls for the exercise of faith, for His present help is not always immediately apparent. Sometimes we have to wait for the manifestation of His present help. Our natural tendency is to endeavour to extricate ourselves from trouble by our own efforts, and God may, for our blessing, keep us waiting until we have learnt that we are utterly without strength to meet the trial, and there is nothing left for us but to "be still" and learn that God is God. Was it not thus, in the gospel day, that the Lord dealt with Martha and Mary when faced with the sickness of their brother? They were in sore trouble, and in their distress the Lord was their refuge. They rightly turned to Him and spread out their trouble before Him. They said, " He whom Thou lovest is sick." The Lord was indeed "a present help," though His help was not immediately forthcoming. Having received the urgent appeal of the sisters, we read that " He abode two days still in the same place where He was." Apparently He was doing nothing. He waited until death closed all hope in human efforts, and there was nothing left for the two sisters but to "be still" and learn that God is God. This was indeed a trial of faith. Martha's faith was not equal to sitting "still," for we read that "Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him; but Mary sat still in the house."

Then we see how graciously the Lord revealed Himself to Martha as "a very present help" in trouble. Martha said, " I know that he shall rise again. . . at the last day." The Lord replied, "I am the resurrection." Then Martha's thoughts travel back to what had been counselled in times past as to the Lord, for she said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world." Her faith believed the great things the Lord will do in a day to come, and she believed in the Lord as connected with all the counsels of God in times past, but her faith was not strong enough to "be still" and believe in the Lord as the great "I am" — the present help in trouble. Have we not to confess that, too often, this is our difficulty. We can believe in the power of God put forth in times past, and that His power will be manifest in days to come, but we are slow to believe that God is so truly "a very present help" that, when there is no duty to be fulfilled, we can "be still" and wait for His help to loe made manifest.

(Psalms 46:2-3). The second and third verses describe the trouble that necessitate a "refuge," requires strength, and calls for "present help". The world, in which the godly man finds himself, is in turmoil and upheaval. The waters roar, and the mountains shake with the swelling/hereof. Often in Scripture the sea, in its restlessness, is used as a symbol of the nations in a state of turmoil (Isa. 5: 30). To-day, can we not hear the roar of the waves as, in every part of the world we see the nations in a state of upheaval, revolution, and conflict? As a result, ancient constitutions that have existed for centuries, and established forms of government that seemed as stable as the mountains, are being overthrown by the rising violence, and increasing corruption of men. Little wonder that men's hearts are "failing them for fear and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth" (Luke 21:26). But, says the Psalmist, "Therefore will not we fear" for "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

What then is the secret that strengthens the people of God to pass through the terrifying conditions of the world without "fear"; that, in the presence of change and upheaval, enables them to "be still", and realise that God is "a very present help in trouble"?

(Psalms 46:4-6). First, God sustains the faith of His people by unfolding to them the secret of His purpose. In this passage the purpose of God is brought before us in the river and the city of God: "There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God."

Through all time, with its changes, upheavals, and conflicts, there flows the river of God's pleasure. No power of the enemy, no violence and corruption of men, no failure of the saints, can thwart God in carrying out His deep eternal counsels. Dispensations come and go: empires rise and fall; every testimony that God commits to the responsibility of men breaks down in their hands. But, over all, and through all, God is carrying out His purpose for the glory of Christ and the blessing of His people, earthly and heavenly.

Secondly, all the blessing that God has purposed for Christ and His people centres in the city of God. The Psalmist looks beyond the desolations of the actual Jerusalem of his day, and, looking by faith into the future, He sees the city according to the counsels of God. There rises before his vision a city of gladness, a "holy place", a city that "shall not be moved", with God dwelling "in the midst of her". So, too, in the presence of all the turmoil and confusion, in the world by which we are surrounded, and the corruptions of Christendom, the believer walks in the light of the heavenly city. We see "the New Jerusalem" — a city of gladness where all tears will be wiped away, where there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain. We see, too, that it is a holy city into which nothing that defiles will ever enter; we see that it will not be moved, for it is a city that hath foundations. Above all, we see that "God is in the midst of her", for we read "the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it." Thus our faith is sustained by the river of God's pleasure, and "the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:10).

Thirdly, the Psalmist sees that though the nations may rage against God's city, yet "God shall help her, and that right early." There is a better, and more beautiful translation that reads, "God shall help her at the dawn of the morning " (N.Tn.). So, again, our privilege is to "look beyond the long dark night and hail the coming day." On every hand we see the nations raging, the kingdoms of the earth being overthrown — the waters roar and are troubled, and the mountains shake; but, even as the Psalmist could say, "He uttered His voice, the earth melted," so we wait to hear the voice of the Lord when He shall say "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away." Then indeed "the dawn of the morning'' will come, the day will break " and the shadows flee away."

(Psalms 46:7). Fourthly, amidst the deepening shadows of the night, until the dawn of the morning, we can say with the Psalmist, "The LORD of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our refuge." The LORD with all power at His disposal, and the God of grace that can take up and bless a poor failing man like Jacob, is with us, and our refuge. When the day dawns we shall be with Christ in the glory of that day; in the meantime He is with us as we pass through the sorrows of the night. He "died for us that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him." Seeing " He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee, . . . we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Hebrews 13:5-6).

(Psalms 46:8-9). Fifthly, the Psalmist sees that in due time God, Himself, will deal in judgment with all the evils of the world; and after the "desolations" of judgment, He will bring in the blessings of the reign of Christ, when wars will cease unto the end of the earth. Men, by their own efforts and wisdom, through leagues, and pacts, and conferences, are seeking to bring about universal peace and introduce a millennium of prosperity without God and without Christ. The Christian, who sees that his blessing is bound up with the city of God, and who knows that God will deal with the evil of this world, refuses to be linked up with man’s futile efforts to end the world’s unrest.

Thus, that we may be delivered from all fear, in the presence of so much that would make the natural heart tremble, we are instructed in the secret purpose of God that cannot fail. We see by faith the city of God shining before us in all its glory and beauty; we wait for the dawn of the day; and, in the meantime, we have the Lord with us to deliver us from every fear, a refuge from every storm. Furthermore, we know that in due time God will judge the wickedness of men and bring in universal peace.

(Psalms 46:10-11). Only as these great truths are held in living faith in our souls shall we be able to " Be still " in the presence of the world’s unrest, even as the Lord, Himself, could sleep in the storm. Our danger is that, in the presence of the increasing evils of the world, we may get over occupied with events and lose sight of the city of God, and thus be tempted to join with men in their efforts to combat the evil. To act thus is to leave God out and seek to meet the evil by human wisdom and human power. If such efforts had any measure of success it would only lead to the exaltation of men. Our part is to "be still" and wait for God to act for His own glory, for God has said, "I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth."

Only as we are "still," shall we be kept in the blessed realisation that the Lord is "with us," "our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

S. Elijah: "A Prophet of the Lord"

Elijah: "A Prophet of the Lord"

"Wot ye not what the Scripture saith of Elias" (Romans 2:2)

Hamilton Smith.

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PREFACE

Meditating upon the path of Elijah through the apostate world of his dark day, we may well exclaim with another, "What a course was thine, Elijah! fraught with trials and death-struggles, but still more fraught with instruction in the heart of Him whom to serve was thy joy and glory; a course entered on in secret prayer and waiting on God, and ended in a chariot of fire to bear thee to Himself!" As we move on to glory, through a world already darkened by the lengthening shadows of the great apostasy, may we too catch the spirit of Elijah and learn to walk in separation from evil, in dependence on God, and devotedness to God; while waiting to be rapt to glory at the coming of the Lord.

H. S.

1 AHAB: THE MESSAGE FROM GOD (1 Kings 17:1)

It was the darkest day in Israel's history when Elijah — the prophet of the living God — entered upon his public ministry. The special work of the prophet is to arouse the consciences, and comfort the hearts of God's people in a day of ruin. First to awaken the failing people of God to their responsibilities by applying the word of God to their consciences, and second, to encourage the faithful by lifting their thoughts above the ruin in which they find themselves, and comforting their hearts with the glories yet to come.

It must be manifest that such ministry is eminently suited to a day of ruin. When all is in order amongst God's people there is neither need nor scope for the prophetic gift. It has been pointed out that in the day of Solomon's glory there was no occasion for the prophet. All was in order; the king administered justice from the throne; the priests and Levites waited upon their service, and the people dwelt in peace. But when, through the failure and disobedience of God's people, all has fallen into disorder, then, in the mercy of God, the prophet is brought upon the scene. The evil of God's people must call forth His judgment, for God will be true to Himself and vindicate the glory of His name. But, as another has said, "Whatever their iniquity may be, God does not smite a people

who have forsaken His ways, until He has sent them a testimony. He may chastise them previously, but will not definitely execute His judgment upon them." Hence it is the very mercy of God that raises up the prophet in a day of ruin. Nor is it otherwise in the ways of God today. In the minds of many, the prophetic gift has been limited to foretelling future events, and thus it has been concluded that the gift of prophecy has been withdrawn. It is true that the revelation of God is complete, and apart from the Word of God, none but an impostor would profess to unfold the future with a "Thus saith the Lord," but it is very far from true that the prophetic gift has ceased. It is evident from the New Testament that this gift holds a very high place in the estimation of God. In 1 Corinthians 14:1-40 we read: "Follow after love and desire spiritual gifts, bat rather that ye may prophesy," for "he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation and comfort." What more important in this day of ruin, of weakness and of failure, among the people of God, than to arouse the consciences of believers to their low spiritual condition, to comfort their hearts by unfolding the coming glories, and to engage their affections with the coming One. He will be a true prophet who can thus speak "unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort."

Elijah in his day was a true prophet of the Lord. Never before had the condition of God’s people sunk to such depths of degradation. Fifty-eight years had passed since the kingdom had been rent in twain upon the death of King Solomon. During this period seven kings had reigned, all, without exception, wicked men. Jeroboam had made Israel to sin with the golden calves. Nadab, his son, "did evil in the sight of the Lord and walked in the way of his father." Baasha was a murderer; Elah his son was a drunkard, Zimri was a traitor and murderer. Omri was a military adventurer who seized the throne and did worse than all that were before him. Ahab, his son, did worse than his father: he married the vile and idolatrous Jezebel and became the leader in apostasy. In his day all trace of the public worship of Jehovah vanished from the land. Idolatry was universal. The golden calves were worshipped at Bethel and Dan; the house of Baal was in Samaria; groves of Baal were on every side, and prophets of Baal publicly conducted their idolatrous rites. Apparently Baal lived and Jehovah had ceased to be. In the midst of this scene of darkness and moral degradation, there appears upon the scene, with dramatic suddenness, a solitary but striking witness to the living God. Elijah the Tishbite publicly confronts the king with a message of coming judgment: "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." The first words of the prophet inform the king that he has to do with the living God, and moreover he is faced by a man who has no fear of him, king though he be. Elijah is called to deliver a most obnoxious message to the most powerful man in the land. Standing consciously before the living God, he is delivered from all fear when standing before the apostate king.

Long years before Jehovah had said to Israel by the mouth of Moses, "Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside and serve other gods, and worship them, and then the Lord’s wrath be kindled against you, and He shut up the heavens, that there be no rain" (Deuteronomy 2:16-17). This solemn warning was unheeded. Idolatry had been almost continuous from the time of Moses, now at length it had become universal. God had borne long, but at last the idolatry of the land provoked "the Lord God of Israel to anger." (1 Kings 16:33), and the judgment long foretold was about to fall. There should be no "dew nor rain" but according to the word of the prophet. God will thus vindicate His word, maintain His glory, bring idolatry into contempt, and honour the man who witnesses to Him.

We may well enquire, What was the secret of Elijah’s boldness in the presence of the king — the assurance with which he foretells the coming judgment, and his confident assertion that all will take place according to his word?

First, to him Jehovah was the living God. On all hands the public recognition of God had entirely ceased. So far as appearances went, there was not a soul in the land that believed in the existence of Jehovah. But in this day of universal declension, Elijah stands boldly forward as one who believed, and publicly avowed, that God lived.

Moreover, he can say of Jehovah that he is One "before whom I stand." Not only he believed in the living God, but, in all that he said and did, he was conscious of being in the presence of God. In result he is delivered from the fear of man, he is kept in perfect calm in the midst of terrible circumstances, and he is conscious of the support of God.

Furthermore, in the New Testament we learn another truth concerning Elijah. James brings the prophet forward as an illustration of the mighty things that can be accomplished by the earnest prayer of one righteous man. Prayer in private was another great secret of his power in public. He could stand before the wicked king because he had knelt before the living God. And his was no mere formal prayer that avails nothing, but an earnest prayer that availeth much. A prayer that had the glory of God in view as well as the blessing of the people, and therefore, "he prayed earnestly that it might not rain." A terrible prayer to have to put up to the living God about the people of God! And yet as Elijah surveyed the condition of the people, and could see no recognition of God throughout the breadth and length of the land, he realized it was better for them to suffer the years of drought, if this would turn them to God, than to enjoy prosperity in defiance of God and pass on to a worse judgment. Zeal for God and love for the people were behind this solemn prayer.

Moreover James reminds us that Elijah was "subject to like passions as we are." Like ourselves he was encompassed with human weaknesses and human infirmities. What a comforting lesson this fact may teach us! We too, like him, can be men of power, if we, in spite of the evil around us, walk in the consciousness that God is the living God, if we seek more constantly to move and speak and act in His presence as standing before Him, and if we are more often found before Him in earnest Spirit-led prayer.

2 CHERITH: THE BROOK THAT DRIED UP (1 Kings 17:2-7) The prophet has been alone with God in the secret place of prayer. Then for a brief moment he witnesses the good confession in the presence of the apostate king. The future, however, holds a far greater service for Elijah; the day will come when he will not only witness for God in the presence of the king, but he will discomfit the assembled hosts of Baal, and turn the nation of Israel to the living God. But the time is not yet ripe for Carmel. The prophet is not ready to speak, the nation not ready to hear. Israel must suffer the years of famine ere they will listen to the Word of God; Elijah must be trained in secret before he can speak for God. The prophet must take the lonely way of Cherith and dwell in distant Zarephath before he stands on the Mount of Carmel. The first step that leads to Carmel in the west, must be taken in another direction. "Get thee hence and turn thee eastward," is the word of the Lord. In God’s due time He will bring His servant to the very spot where He is going to use him, but He will bring him there in a right condition to be used. To become a vessel fit for the Master’s use, he must dwell for a time in solitary places and travel by rough ways, therein to learn his own weakness and the mighty power of God.

Every servant of God has his Cherith before he reaches his Carmel. Joseph, on the road to universal dominion, must have his Cherith. He must pass by way of the pit and the prison to reach the throne. Moses must have his Cherith at the backside of the desert before he becomes the leader of God's people through the wilderness. And was not the Lord Himself alone in the wilderness forty days tempted of Satan, and with the wild beasts, before He came forth in public ministry before men? Not indeed, as with ourselves, to discover our weakness and be stripped of our self-sufficiency, but rather to reveal His infinite perfections, and discover to us His perfect suitability for the work which none but Himself could accomplish. The testing circumstances that were used to reveal the perfections of Christ, are needed in our case to bring to light our imperfections, that all may be judged in the presence of God, and we may thus become vessels fitted for His use. This indeed was the first lesson that Elijah had to learn at Cherith — the lesson of the empty vessel. "Get thee hence," said the Lord, "and hide thyself." The man who is going to witness for God must learn to keep himself out of sight. In order to be preserved from making something of himself before men, he must learn his own nothingness before God. Elijah must spend three and a half years in hidden seclusion with God before he spends one day in prominence before men. But God has other lessons for Elijah. Is he to exercise faith in the living God before Israel? Then he must first learn to live by faith from day to day in secret before God. The brook and the ravens are provided by God to meet His servant's needs, but the confidence of Elijah must be in the unseen and living God, and not in things seen — in brooks and ravens. "I have commanded," said the Lord, and faith rests in the word of the Lord

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

Moreover, implicit obedience to the word of the Lord is the only path of blessing. And Elijah took this path, for we read, "He went and did according to the word of the Lord." He went where the Lord told him to go, he did what the Lord told him to do. When the Lord says, "Go and do," as to the lawyer in the Gospel, unquestioning and immediate obedience is the only path of blessing. But the brook Cherith had a yet harder and deeper lesson for the prophet — the lesson of the brook that dried up. The Lord had said, "Thou shalt drink of the brook;" in obedience to the word "he drank of the brook;" and then we read, words which at first sound so passing strange, "the brook dried up." The very brook that the Lord had provided, of which He had bid the prophet drink, runs dry. What can it mean? Has Elijah after all taken a wrong step, and is he in a false position? impossible! God had said, "I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there." Was he doing the wrong thing? Far from it; had not God said, "Thou shalt drink of the brook"? Beyond all question he was in the right place, he was doing the right thing. He was in the place of God's appointment; he was obeying the word of the Lord — and yet the brook dried up.

How painful this experience, how mysterious this providence. To be in the place of God's appointment, to be acting in obedience to His express commands, and yet suddenly to be called to face the complete failure of the provision that God has made for the daily need. How testing for faith. Had not Elijah boldly said before the king that he stood before the living God? Now he is confronted with the drying brook to test the reality of his faith in the living God. Will his faith in the living God stand firm when earthly streams run dry? If God lives, what matter if the brook dries?

God is greater than all the mercies He bestows. Mercies may be withdrawn, but God remains. The prophet must learn to trust in God rather than in the gifts that He gives. That the Giver is greater than His gifts is the deep lesson of the brook that dried up. Is not the story of the brook that dried up told in a different setting when, at a later day, sickness and death invaded the quiet home life at Bethany? Two sisters bereft of their only brother came face to face with the brook that dried up. But their trial turned to the "glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby." That which brings glory to the Son, carries blessing to the saints. If Lazarus was taken, Jesus the Son of God remained, taking occasion by the failure of earthly streams to reveal a fountain of love that never fails, and a source of power that has no limit. So, too, in the prophet's day, the brook that dried up became the occasion of unfolding greater glories of Jehovah, and richer blessings for Elijah. It was but an incident used by God to take the prophet on his journey from Cherith — the place of the failing brook — to the home at Zarephath, there to discover the meal that never failed, the oil that did not waste, and the God that raised the dead. If God allows the brook to dry up, it is because He has some better, brighter portion for His beloved servant. Nor it is otherwise with the people of God today. We all like to have some earthly resource to draw upon; yet how often, in the ways of a Father that knoweth we have need of these things, we have to face the brook that dries up. In different forms it crosses our path: perhaps by bereavement, or by the breakdown of health, or by the sudden failure of some source of supply, we find ourselves beside the brook that has dried up. It is well if, in such moments — rising above the ruin of our earthly hopes, the failure of human props — we can by faith in the living God accept all from Him. The very trial we shall then find to be the means God is using to unfold to us the vast resources of His heart of love, and lead our souls into deeper, richer blessing than we have ever known.

3 ZAREPHATH: THE WIDOW'S HOME (1 Kings 17:8-24) The brook had failed, but the Lord remained. His servant was not forgotten. He knew his need and had seen the drying of the brook. But no word of warning came, and no fresh direction, until the brook had dried. The love of the Lord will meet the need of His saints, but the way His wisdom takes will keep them in the path of faith.

Moreover, the plan the Lord unfolds is so remarkable, so contrary to all that the prophet could have conceived, so opposed to his religious training, his natural thoughts and spiritual instincts, that had the plan been unfolded to the prophet before the drying of the brook, possibly he would not have yielded so ready an obedience. Like the prophet of a later day, when sent to another Gentile city, he might have fled in an opposite direction. Elijah was a man of like passions with ourselves, and it may be, even as we, he needed the pressure of circumstances to make him willing to obey, and take a path so distasteful to him as a natural man.

For, strange as it may seem, the prophet is told to arise and go to Zarephath and dwell there. He is to leave the promised land and go to a city of the Gentiles, and of all cities, a city that belonged to Zidon — the home of Baal, whose worship had brought ruin on the land — the home, too, of the wicked Jezebel, who had introduced the worship of Baal and murdered the prophets of the Lord. And, stranger still, arrived in that foreign land, the great prophet was to be dependent upon a widow woman for his daily sustenance. For, said the Lord, "Behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee." Had the Lord commanded the prophet to sustain the widow woman we might think it more fitting. But no, God's plan is that the widow woman is to sustain the prophet. There were other cities and other lands that surrounded Israel far less guilty than Zidon. There

were "many widows" in Israel in as sad a plight, but they will not suit God's plan. As ever, God has Christ in view. A thousand years thence, in the city of Nazareth, the Lord would require an illustration of sovereign grace, and therefore to a needy widow in the thrice guilty land of Zidon the prophet Elijah must go. God has a purpose in every detail of the path He plans for His servants, though a thousand years may pass before that purpose is disclosed. The faith of the prophet yields unquestioning obedience to the word of the Lord. "He arose and went to Zarephath." Moved by faith, urged possibly by the untoward circumstances, he obeys the Lord and takes his solitary way to the distant city of Zidon, across — A barren thirsty ground With thorns and briars overspread, Where foes and snares abound.

Arrived at the city gate the prophet is confronted by the widow. To natural sight and human reason it seems impossible that this can be the widow by whom he is to be sustained. In absolute poverty, this desolate and starving woman has reached the end of her resources. With only a handful of meal and a little oil in a cruse, she is gathering a few sticks to prepare one last meal for herself and her son, and then to wait for death to end their sufferings. With only sufficient for one more meal, how can she sustain the prophet? The widow speaks indeed of the living God, but it is Elijah's God, for she says "thy God," not "my God." She had no personal faith in the living God: her hopes were connected with the barrel of meal and the cruse of oil, and, as they are failing, there is nothing before her but the gates of death. God, however, has mother way than death for the widow. His sovereign grace has purposed that life — resurrection life — shall fill her home with blessing. As for Elijah, in God's due time he shall pass into the glory, not through the gates of death but by a chariot of fire and horses of fire. Meanwhile he must dwell for a time at Zarephath. Now Zarephath signifies the place of the smelting furnace. The prophet has passed the test of the failing brook at Cherith, he must now face the furnace of trial at Zarephath. But this is God's road to Carmel. Is he to call down fire from heaven? Then indeed he must pass through the fire on earth. Is he going to stand for the living God before all Israel? Then first he must learn in secret the sustaining power of God in the furnace of trial. The failing brook at Cherith, and the refining fire at Zarephath, are steps in the journey to Carmel and the chariot of fire.

Yet how humbling to pride to be sustained by a widow woman; how withering to all self-confidence the distressing circumstances. But the desolate widow, the handful of meal, the cruse of oil, and death hovering over all, only serve to unfold the resources of the living God. And, the utter weakness and hopelessness of the circumstances being revealed, God is free to unfold the resources of grace. Elijah's request for "a little water" and "a morsel of bread" bring to light the condition of the widow woman. And truth being maintained, grace can be displayed. How rich the grace that filled the widow's home! All fear was banished, for the first words of grace were "Fear not."

Then follows the provision of grace. "The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail." Their needs are met and death is driven from the door.

Further, in this fine scene we have the teaching of grace, for not only does grace bring salvation to the needy, but it teaches us how to live. The life given by grace is a dependent life. It was not a barrel of meal or a cruse of oil that was promised. The supplies of grace are indeed unlimited, but grace gives no store in hand such as nature delights to possess. The promise was that the handful of meal should not waste nor the oil in the cruse grow less. There would be sufficient for each day

but no store for the morrow. Grace teaches us to live in dependence on the Giver of the grace.

Lastly, there is the hope of grace, for grace holds out a blessed prospect. "The day," the great day, the happy day, was coming, when the Lord would send rain upon the earth. How happy the home, be it but a widow's cottage, that is fed by the provision of grace, directed by the teaching of grace, and cheered by the hope of grace. In far greater fulness this same grace has been revealed in this the day of grace. In the widow's home we move amongst the shadows, but now we have the substance, since the One has come who is full of grace and truth. Throughout all the days of our pilgrim journey in this world of need we, too, have the barrel of meal that shall not waste, and the cruse of oil that never fails. Does not the meal — the fine flour — speak to us of Christ, of whom it is said, "THOU REMAINEST," and "THOU ART THE SAME"? (Hebrews 1:11-12). Others may fail us, but He remains. Others may change, but He is the same. And does not the oil speak of that other Comforter — the Holy Spirit — who has come to abide with us for ever? (John 14:16). Earthly streams run dry, but with the living Christ in the glory, and the indwelling Spirit on earth, the Christian possesses never-failing resources.

Moreover, the grace that has brought salvation to us, teaches us to live "soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." Such a life can only be lived by daily dependence upon Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. And the grace that has brought salvation, and teaches us how to live, has set before us that blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ. The appearing of grace leads on to the appearing of glory (Titus 2:11, Titus 2:13). Then indeed the needs of the saints will be met, their trials for ever past, and earth's famine for ever ended. Well may we sing: —

He shall come down like showers Upon the new-mown grass, And joy, and hope, like flowers, Spring up where He doth pass:

Before Him on the mountains, Shall peace the herald go; And righteousness, in fountains, From hill to valley flow. But further revelations of the glory of the living God await the household at Zarephath. God has other lessons for Elijah, and deeper exercises for the widow. God would reveal Himself not only as the Sustainer of life, but as the Giver of life. To be equipped for the great day of Carmel, Elijah must know God as the God of resurrection. To be established in peaceful relations with God, the widow must know God as the God of truth as well as the God of grace, and for this conscience must be awakened, her sin recalled, and her sin judged. With these high ends in view the shadow of death is allowed to fall upon the widow's home. Her only son falls sick and dies. For a full year the widow has enjoyed in simple faith the mercies that God has provided, but at length in the presence of death her conscience is awakened and she remembers her sin, for death is the wages of sin. As long as life flows quietly and our daily needs are met, we may live with little exercise as to much that, in God's sight, calls for self-judgment. But under the exercise of some special trial, conscience becomes active, the vision is cleared, and much that may have been wrong in the past in thoughts, words, habits and ways, is seen, dealt with, and judged, in God's presence.

Elijah, too, has lessons to learn in this great trial. It becomes a fresh occasion for the exercise of his faith in the living God. Very beautifully he looks beyond the disease and the power of death, and sees in the evil that has come upon them the hand of the living God. In his view it is not disease that has killed the child, not death that has struck him down, it is God that has slain the

widow’s son. If it is the work of disease and death there is no hope, for they could take the child away but they cannot bring him back. But if God has slain the child, then God can recall the child to life. The faith of Elijah keeps God between himself and the sorrowful circumstances. But Elijah recognizes that in himself he has no power. This may be signified by the act of stretching himself on the child, or, as the margin reads, he "measured" himself. He thoroughly identifies himself with the dead child; he takes his measure and realizes that, like the dead child, he has no strength. Elijah is powerless in the presence of death. But if the child is dead, God is living. If Elijah has no power, Elijah can pray. By the act of stretching he identifies himself with the powerlessness of the child; by the act of prayer he puts himself in touch with the mighty power of the living God. The man of like passions with ourselves again draws down the power of God by prayer. "O Lord my God, I pray thee let this child’s soul come into him again." As One with whom he is in conscious relationship, and well known and proved, he can say with great confidence, "My God." His faith recognizes that it is within the power of the living God to raise the dead child, and with yet greater faith he prays that it may come to pass. Did ever man, before or since, ask a greater request of God in language so simple and in a prayer so brief. Very evident is it that the effectual fervent prayer is neither elaborate nor lengthy. The prayer is heard and the request is granted. God reveals Himself as the God of resurrection. Not only is God the living God; not only is He the Source of life, and the Sustainer of life; but He can impart life to the dead. He breaks the power of death and robs the grave of victory by the mighty power of resurrection.

Elijah laying no claim to the risen child delivers him back to the mother. The woman at once discerns that he is a "Man of God." We know also that Elijah was a "Man of like passions." And the man of like passions was transformed into a man of God by the fact that he was a "Man of prayer."

4 OBADIAH: THE GOVERNOR OF THE KING’S HOUSE (1 Kings 18:1-16) At last the years of famine draw to their close, and again the word of the Lord comes to Elijah saying, "Go, shew thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth." In the beginning of the years of drought the Lord had said to Elijah, "Get thee hence, and hide thyself;" now the word is, "Go, shew thyself." There is a time to hide ourselves and a time to show ourselves; a time to proclaim the word of the Lord from the housetops, and a time to draw "apart into a desert place and rest a while." A time to pass through the land "as unknown," and a time to mingle with the crowd "as well known" (2 Corinthians 6:9). Such changes are the common lot of all true servants of the Lord. The Baptist, in his day, was in the desert "as unknown" till the day of his showing to Israel "as well known;" only to withdraw again from the public gaze in the presence of One of whom he could say, "He must increase, but I must decrease." This grace, which knows when to come forward and when to withdraw, finds its most perfect expression in the Lord’s own path. He can gather all the city at the door of His lodging as One that is "well known," and rising a great while before day, He can depart into a solitary place "as unknown." But such changes in the path of the servant, if they are to meet with a ready obedience, demand low thoughts of self and great confidence in God. This high quality of faith was not wanting in Elijah. Without raising a single objection he "went to shew himself unto Ahab." His secret training had fitted him for the demands of the occasion. In the eyes of the king, Elijah was an outlawed man, a troubler of Israel, and to show himself to the monarch would be simple madness in the light of human reason. Could not God bring rain upon the earth without exposing His servant to the wrath of the king? Doubtless He could, but this would by no means meet the circumstances of the case. The rain had been withheld at the word of Elijah in the

presence of the king, and the coming of the rain must also depend upon the intervention of God's prophet in the presence of the king. Had the rain returned apart from the public testimony of Elijah, he would at once have been set down as a false prophet and a boaster, and still worse, the deliverance would have been attributed by the prophets of Baal to their idol.

We are not left in any doubt as to the moral condition of the king. While Elijah journeys from Zarephath at the word of the Lord and for the glory of the Lord, the king takes a journey prompted by pure selfishness and with no higher object than the preservation of his stud. For three and a half years neither rain nor dew has fallen — the famine is sore in the land — king and people are proving that it is "an evil thing and bitter" to forsake the Lord God and worship idols. But what of the king? Has this sore calamity softened his heart, and wrought repentance before the Lord? Is he journeying through his kingdom seeking to alleviate the distress of his starving people and calling upon all to cry to God? Alas! his thoughts are occupied with his horses and mules rather than his starving people; and so far from seeking God he is merely seeking grass. A weak, self-centred, self-indulgent man, controlled by a strong-minded idolatrous woman, he has become the leader in apostasy, and the avowed enemy of the man of God. And now, unmoved by the terrible visitation of the drought and the famine, the universal misery finds him still pursuing his selfish and frivolous life, alike indifferent to the sufferings of his people, and to the claims of God. Such is the picture of human depravity presented by the king. But at this point another and a very different character passes before us. Obadiah was one who feared the Lord greatly, and who, in times past, had wrought a very signal service for the prophets of the Lord, and yet, strangely enough, he is the governor of the king's house. What an anomaly that one who fears the Lord greatly should be found in intimate association with the apostate king. "It was not," as one has said, "that he was betrayed at times merely, nor was it that his way was stained at times, but his whole life evinces a man of mixed principles."

Both Elijah and Obadiah were saints of God, but their meeting is marked by reserve rather than by the communion of saints. Obadiah is deferential and conciliatory, Elijah cold and distant. What fellowship can there be between God's stranger and Ahab's minister? Another has truly remarked, "We cannot serve the world, and go on in the course of it behind each other's backs, and then assume we can meet as saints and enjoy sweet communion."

Obadiah tries to escape from a mission which in his sight is fraught with danger. "What," he exclaims, "have I sinned, that I should be sent to the king?" But Elijah had said nothing about sinning. Then Obadiah pleads his good deeds. Had not Elijah heard of his kindness in times past to the prophets of the Lord? However, it was no question of bad deeds or good deeds; the source of all Obadiah's trouble was the false position he was in. He was a man of the unequal yoke. The Spirit of God takes occasion by this scene to depict the solemn results of the unequal yoke between righteousness and unrighteousness, light and darkness, Christ and Belial, he that believeth, and an infidel (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

1. Obadiah takes his orders from the apostate king. Elijah takes his directions from the Lord and moves and acts according to the commands of the Lord. Obadiah, though indeed he may fear the Lord, is not used in the service of the Lord, and gets no directions from the Lord. Ahab is his master, Ahab he has to serve, and from Ahab he takes his directions. Thus in this time of natural calamity he fritters his time away in the trivial work of seeking grass for his master's beasts.

2. He lives at a low spiritual level. Being in the way on his master's errands, "Behold Elijah met him." In the presence of the prophet, Obadiah falls on his face addressing him as "My lord Elijah," indicating that he is conscious of the lower level on which he lives. Obadiah may dwell in the palaces of kings; Elijah in the lonely places of the earth, companion of the widow and the fatherless; nevertheless Obadiah knows full well that Elijah is the greater man. The high positions of this world may carry with them earthly honours, but cannot impart spiritual dignities. Elijah will not even recognize that Obadiah is a servant of the Lord. To him he is only a servant of the wicked king, for he says, "Go, tell thy lord, behold Elijah is here."

3. Obadiah's sad reply clearly reveals that he lives in craven fear of the king. The servant of a selfish autocrat, he shrinks from a mission which may incur his wrath and summary vengeance.

4. Not only does this unhallowed association keep Obadiah living in fear of the king, but it destroys his confidence in God. He recognizes that the Spirit of the Lord will protect Elijah from the king's vengeance, but, for himself, he has no faith to count upon the protection of God. A false position and an uneasy conscience have robbed him of all confidence in the Lord.

5. Lacking confidence in the Lord, he is not ready to be used by the Lord. He shrinks from a mission in which he can see danger and possibly death. Three times he repeats that Ahab will slay him. He seeks to be excused the mission, pleading the wickedness of the king on the one hand, and his own goodness on the other.

How different the attitude of Elijah. Walking in separation from evil, he is filled with holy boldness. Not, however, that his confidence was in himself, or his separate walk, but in the living God. He can say to Obadiah, "As the Lord of Hosts liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely show myself unto him today." How solemn, that Elijah is compelled to address a saint of God in the very terms in which he had addressed the apostate king (1 Kings 17:1; 1 Kings 18:15). Obadiah, standing before the king; is filled with the fear of death; Elijah, standing before the living God, is filled with calm and holy confidence. In faith in the living God he had warned the king of the coming drought; in faith in the living God he had been sustained in secret during the years of drought; in faith in the living God he can once more face the king, saying without a trace of fear, "I will surely shew myself unto him today."

Obadiah had passed through no such training. His had been the path of ease rather than the path of faith. He had moved in the crowded scenes of the city as the head official in the court of the king and not in the solitary places of the earth as the faithful servant of the Lord. His sphere has been the king's royal palace rather than the widow's humble home. In the eyes of the natural man, how desirable the position of Obadiah with its ease, and wealth, and exalted station, and how distressing the lowly path of Elijah with its poverty and privations. But faith esteems the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt. Elijah found greater riches amidst the poverty of the widow's home than Obadiah enjoyed amidst the splendours of the king's palace. May we not say that, at Zarephath, there were unfolded before the prophet's vision "the unsearchable riches of Christ," the meal that never wasted, the oil that never failed, and the God who raised the dead? No such blessings fell to the lot of Obadiah. Truly he escaped the reproach of Christ, but he missed the unsearchable riches of Christ. He escaped the trial of faith and lost the rewards of faith. Of Moses, in a yet earlier day, it could be said, "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king, for he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible." So here we may surely say of Elijah, he

turned his back on the world of his day, not fearing the wrath of the king, and, with his vision of the living God, he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. All this was wanting in Obadiah. He may have feared God in secret, but he feared the king in public. He never broke with the world, and he had no vision of the living God.

Apart from the world, in holy separation to God, the prophet Elijah is in touch with heaven, and sees unfolded before his eyes the wonders of grace and the power of God. To these heavenly wonders Obadiah is a complete stranger: identified with the world and associated with the apostate king, he can only mind earthly things, and thus, while Elijah is seeking the glory of God and the blessing of Israel, Obadiah is seeking grass for horses and mules.

Having delivered Elijah's message, Obadiah drops out of the story, while Elijah passes on to fresh honours as a witness of the living God, to receive at last a passage to glory in a chariot of fire.

5 CARMEL: THE FIRE FROM HEAVEN (2 Kings 18:16-40)

Obadiah having delivered his message, King Ahab went to meet the prophet and at once charges him with being the troubler of Israel. The land may be filled with idols and idol temples; idol groves and idolatrous altars, served by idolatrous priests, may stand on every side; the people may have forsaken the Lord and followed Baalim; the king may be the leader in apostasy, and his wife a heathen murderess; these accumulated evils are no trouble to the king. But is there a drought in the land, and a famine in Samaria which interferes with his pleasures and endangers his stud? — then indeed it is a grievous trouble, and the man at whose words the heavens are shut is, in the sight of the king, a troubler. In touch with the power of the living God, Elijah may raise the dead and command the rain; but does he denounce sin and warn the sinner? — then forthwith he is a troubler. The presence of the man who lays sin upon the conscience and brings the sinner into the presence of God, is ever troublesome in this world. At the coming of Christ Himself into the world, Herod "was troubled and all Jerusalem with him." And in a still later day, Paul and his companions were looked upon as troublers, for the enraged citizens of Philippi could say, "These men . . . do exceedingly trouble our city." The worldly Christian will not be viewed as a troubler, even as Obadiah, in his day, so far from being a troubler, was looked upon as an extremely useful member of society and accordingly made governor of the king's household. It is the man of God as he stands apart from the course of this world — while witnessing to its evil and warning of coming judgment — who will ever be a troubler, even though he proclaims grace and points the way of blessing. With great boldness and plainness of speech the prophet throws the charge back upon the king, "I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father's house." In faithfulness he explains how they have done so, and brings home Ahab's personal sin: "Ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim."

Having charged him with his sins, he shows the king there is but one possible way to end the famine and reach the day when the Lord will send rain upon the earth. The sin that has brought the judgment must be dealt with in judgment. To this end Ahab is told to gather all Israel to Carmel, together with the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table. All that have been concerned in this great sin must be present. The leaders and the led are to gather to Carmel. No privileges that any may enjoy, no position, however exalted, they may fill, will be allowed as a plea for absence. Those who feast at the royal table, and those who minister to Baal, must be present with all the people.

Even the abandoned king realizes the desperate condition of the land, and hence, without further remonstrance, he carries out Elijah's demand. All Israel and all the idolatrous prophets are gathered to Carmel. This great host having assembled, Elijah came forth and addresses himself "unto all the people." He makes three distinct appeals. First he seeks to arouse the conscience of the people. He says, "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him." The audience in whose hearing Elijah makes this powerful appeal was composed of a degraded king, a corrupt company of prophets, and a fashionable crowd of undecided triflers. Passing by the king and prophets, Elijah speaks directly to the people. The king was the leader in apostasy, and already had been charged with his sins. The prophets of Baal were the avowed opponents of God, and were about to be exposed and judged. But the vast mass of the people were undecided, halting between two opinions. By profession they were the people of Jehovah, by practice they were the worshippers of Baal. Appealing to their conscience, he says, "How long halt ye between two opinions?"

Today we are faced with the representatives of these three classes. There are the leaders in apostasy; men who have made an outward profession of Christianity, but who deny the Lord that bought them, and have turned back to their wallowing in the mire. Then there are an increasing number in Christendom who make no profession of Christianity, who zealously propagate their false religious systems, and are the avowed enemies of God the Father and God the Son. But there is another class, the vast mass of nominal Christians who "halt between two opinions." Alas, they have no personal faith in Christ, nothing but "opinions." With them, God and His word, Christ and His cross, time and eternity, heaven and hell, are merely matters of opinion — opinions that result in no settled convictions, for in regard to these solemn realities they have "TWO opinions." They would not oppose Christ, but they will not confess Christ. They have no wish to fall out with God, but they would fain keep in with the world. They would like to escape the judgment of sin, but they are bent upon enjoying the pleasures of sin. They would like to die as saints, but they prefer to live as sinners. At times they will talk of morality, discuss social and religious problems, or join in theological controversies. But they carefully evade all personal dealing with God, decision for Christ, and confession of His Name. They halt, they hesitate, they procrastinate, they practically say, "Some day we will turn to Christ, but not yet; some day we will be saved, but not yet; some day we will face our sins, but not yet."

Let such pay heed to Elijah's conscience-reaching question, "How long?" How long will sinners leave unsettled the great question of their soul's eternal destiny? How long will they waste their lives, play with sin, neglect salvation, and trifle with God? Let such remember that God has an answer to this question as well as men, and that God's disposals are usually very different to man's proposals. The rich man of the Gospel story proposed to answer this question according to his thoughts, and God called him a fool for his pains. "How long shall I live?" said he. And for answer he promised himself "many years." But very different was God's answer, "This night thy soul shall be required of thee." This solemn question "How long?" brooks no delay. True the grace of God is without limit, but the day of grace wears to its end. For long centuries the sunlight of grace has shone upon this guilty world; now the shadows lengthen and the night draws on. The sun of grace is setting amidst the gathering clouds of judgment. Let triflers beware lest when God says "How long?" men halt too long, only to hear at last those terrible words, "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out My hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at

nought all My counsel, and would none of My reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon Me, but I will not answer; they shall seek Me early, but they shall not find Me" (Proverbs 1:24-28). In Elijah's day men were silenced by this appeal. They "answered him not a word." Every mouth was stopped. They stood before the prophet a silent, conscience-stricken, self-condemned people.

Having convicted the people of their sin, the prophet makes his second appeal. He reminds the nation that he alone is the prophet of the Lord, but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men. How evil the time when there is but one true prophet to stand against four hundred and fifty false ones. There were indeed seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal, nevertheless there was only one man left to witness for the Lord. It is good to refuse to acknowledge Baal, but there is a vast difference between not bowing down in worship to Baal and standing up to witness for the Lord. Obadiah may fear the Lord greatly, but his unhallowed association has closed his mouth. We hear no word of him on Carmel. The fear of God may lead seven thousand to mourn before God in secret, but the fear of man withholds them from witnessing for God in public. In all that great company the prophet stood alone. And let us not forget that with all his holy boldness, he was a man of like passions with ourselves. The living God before whom he stood was the source of his power.

Alone though he be, Elijah does not hesitate to challenge the crowd of false prophets. He has rebuked the king; he has convicted the nation of trifling indecision; he will now expose the folly of these false prophets and the vanity of their gods. Who is the God of Israel? is the momentous question. Elijah boldly proposes that this great question shall be submitted to the trial by fire. "The God that answereth by fire, let him be God." The appeal is to God. The decision shall not rest with the solitary prophet of the Lord or the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal. It shall be no question of man's reasonings or of the opinion of one man against four hundred and fifty. God shall decide. The prophets of Baal shall prepare one altar, Elijah shall rebuild the altar of the Lord, and the God that answereth by fire shall be God. This appeal to reason meets with the immediate and unanimous approval of Israel: "All the people answered and said, It is well spoken." The prophets of Baal are silent, but in the face of the people's approval they cannot evade the issue. They prepare their altar, dress their bullock, and call upon their god. From morning until noon they cry to Baal. It was in vain, there was no voice nor any that answered. Until mid-day Elijah is a silent witness of their futile efforts; then at length, for the first and only time, he speaks to these false prophets, and now it is only to mock them. Lashed by the scorn of Elijah they redouble their efforts. For three hours longer — from noon until the time of the evening sacrifice — they cry aloud and cut themselves with knives until the blood gushed out. Still it is all in vain, "There was neither voice nor any to answer, nor any that regarded." The discomfiture of the false prophets being complete, Elijah makes his third appeal to the people. He has spoken to their conscience, he has appealed to their reason, now he will speak to their hearts. He gathers them around him with the gracious invitation, "Come near unto me." In response "all the people come near unto him." In silence they watch the prophet as he repairs the altar of the Lord. Having thrown down the altar of Baal, he sets up the altar of the Lord. It is not enough to expose the false; the truth must be upheld. To maintain the truth he builds his altar with twelve stones. In spite of the divided state of the nation, faith recognizes the unity of the twelve tribes. Every tribe must be represented in the

altar of the Lord. Faith sees that the day is coming when idolatry will be judged and the nation will be one, with God in the midst. Such is the word of the Lord by Ezekiel: "Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land; and I will make them one nation upon the mountains of Israel; and one King shall be king to them all: and they shall no more be two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all: neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols . . . but I will save them . . . and will cleanse them: so shall they be my people and I will be their God" (Ezekiel 37:21-23). The altar erected, the victim laid thereon, all being thrice drenched with water, and the time of the evening sacrifice being come, the prophet turns to God in prayer. In his prayer, Elijah makes nothing of himself but everything of God. He seeks no place for himself; he has no desire to exalt himself before the people; he would be known only as a servant carrying out the commands of the Lord. His one desire is that God may be glorified. To this end he would have all the people know that Jehovah is God; that Jehovah is doing "all these things"; that Jehovah is speaking to their heart to turn the people back to himself. The prayer of Elijah receives an immediate answer: "The fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice." How wonderful is this scene. A holy God who must deal with all evil by the consuming fire of judgment, and a guilty nation steeped in the evil which the holy God must judge. Surely the fire of the Lord must fall, and equally surely, the nation must be consumed. How can they escape? How are their hearts to be turned back to the Lord? Here is an issue that no fervent prayer of a righteous man can meet. If the guilty nation is to be spared, then the altar must be built, and a sacrifice provided that will represent the guilty nation under the eye of God and on which the judgment they have merited can fall. And thus it came to pass, for we read, "The fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice." The judgment falls upon the victim, the nation goes free.

"And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces, and they said, ’The Lord He is the God; the Lord He is the God.’" In the marvellous provision of the sacrifice, the righteousness of God finds a way whereby justice is satisfied, judgment is borne, and the heart of the nation is won. Who can fail to trace in this scene a bright foreshadowing of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, when, by the eternal Spirit, He offered Himself without spot to God? Yet, withal, it has its striking contrasts, for while on Carmel the fire of judgment consumed the burnt sacrifice, at Calvary, may we not say, the sacrifice consumed the fire of judgment. Similarly, the Jewish sacrifices were oft repeated and could never take away sins. In their case the judgment was always greater than the sacrifice, but at Calvary One is found Who, as the Sacrifice, is greater than the judgment. There the storm of judgment that was over our heads burst on His head, and was spent; the judgment He bore He exhausted. Resurrection is the everlasting proof of this. He was delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification. But what will all this avail unless by faith we see it? "When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces" and worshipped. In our case, too, faith’s sight of the dead and risen Christ will bow our hearts in worship. The very sacrifice by which God has cleared His people from all judgment has so manifested His love that He has won our hearts. "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." Truly we may say of God’s people today, He has "turned their heart back again," and, like Israel, there is nothing left for His people but to fall on their faces in adoring worship.

CARMEL: THE COMING OF THE RAIN (1 Kings 18:41-46)

Judgment prepares the way for blessing, and thus the fire from heaven is followed by the rain from heaven. The opened ear of Elijah catches "a sound of abundance of rain." A going in the tops of the trees, trouble on the waters — the low moaning of earth — told the listening ear of Elijah that at last the day was at hand when the Lord would send rain upon the earth.

If by a closer walk with God our ears were more attuned to catch His faintest whispers, and our minds were more enlightened to interpret them aright, should we not often, in the low sad moans that rise from this troubled world, hear His voice telling of coming blessing? In the sigh from some sick bed, or the wail of a bereaved one, or the cry of a disappointed heart, should we not discern the sound of coming blessing for the grief-stricken soul? No such sounds reached the ear of King Ahab. Absorbed with his own selfish pleasures, his heart was waxed gross, and his ears dull of hearing. Only faith can read the signs of the times and enter into the secret of the Lord. When all seems dead among the people of God, when there is no apparent result from the preaching of the Gospel, when there are Few conversions among sinners, and little growth among saints, it needs indeed a close walk with God to see His hand at work.

However, when God’s voice is heard and His hand seen, it produces immediate results. Is the rain coming? then Ahab will go up to eat and drink, while Elijah — the man with the opened ear — will go up to the top of Carmel to pray. For three and a half years the rain has been withheld and the famine has been sore in the land. Now the rain is coming, the famine is over. Surely Ahab will turn to God with thanksgiving. He has seen the vanity of idols, the exposure of the false prophets, the fire from heaven, and the awful judgment of the prophets of Baal. Alas, no impression is made on the king; God is not in all his thoughts. Little he cares for Jehovah or Baal, for the prophet of the living God or the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal. His one thought is: "This tiresome famine is over, the rain is coming; I can now enjoy myself without hindrance." So he goes up to eat and drink, celebrating the occasion with a feast. It is ever thus with the world. God lays His hand upon men in government and, for a time, they are afflicted with war, or famine and pestilence. No sooner is relief afforded than they return with renewed zest to their feasting, drinking, and pleasure, and God is forgotten.

How different is the effect upon the man of Gods He hears the sound of coming rain and he knows it is no time for feasting with the world, but for drawing apart from men — to get alone with God at the top of the hill. When the world goes up to feast it is the time for God’s people to go up to prayer. Nature might say, if there is the sound of abundance of rain there is no need to pray, but for the spiritual man it is a divine summons to prayer. For prayer to be effectual, however, there are certain conditions with which we must comply. These come before us in this great scene. First, effectual prayer demands that we withdraw from the hurry and press of this world into holy retirement with God. Like Elijah we must go up to the top of the hill. As the Lord Himself instructs us, "When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father" (Matthew 6:6). How often our prayers are unavailing for the lack of the "shut door." To be consciously in the presence of God we need to compose our spirits, call in our wandering thoughts, and shut the door on the world. Holy separation and retirement is the first great requisite for effectual prayer.

Then, again, we must take our true place in the dust before God, and this we see strikingly set forth in the prophet. Arrived at the top of the hill he goes down into the valley of humiliation. "He

cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees." A few short hours before he had stood for God in the presence of the king, the false prophets and all the people of Israel, and the people had fallen upon their faces. Now, the false prophets are dead, the crowds have dispersed, and Elijah is left alone with God. At once he casts himself down upon the earth and hides his face. Before all Israel God will support and honour His servant, but, alone with God, he must learn his own nothingness in the presence of God's greatness. Then, he was witnessing for God before sinners, commanding king, prophets and people; now he is alone waiting upon God as a suppliant, and, as such, he, too, must remember that he is but dust, entirely dependent upon the mercy of God. "Behold, now," says Abraham, "I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes" (Genesis 18:27). An old divine has said, "The lower the heart descends the higher the prayer ascends. God accepts broken expressions when they come from broken hearts." The story discloses to us another of the secrets of effectual fervent prayer. We must not only pray but "watch and pray." As the apostle exhorts us, "Persevere in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving" (Colossians 4:2). Again we read, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance" (Ephesians 6:18). In Elijah's prayer we see this watching, for he said to his servant, "Go up now look toward the sea." And he went up and looked and said, "There is nothing." He watched, but at first he saw nothing. He heard the sound that summoned him to prayer, and he prayed, and he watched, but at first he sees nothing. How often it is thus with God's people today. They pray and watch thereunto, but for a time God sees fit to keep them waiting. God has lessons to teach us, and so for a while He may keep us waiting at His door We watch to see God's hand at work, and lo, we see nothing. Is it not to teach us that nothing of God is seen because something of self fills our vision? We must learn our own nothingness before we see God at work. We think God will hear us because of the urgency of the case, the fervency of our prayers, the justness of our cause. But God keeps us waiting until we are conscious that, though before men we may indeed have a just cause, before God we are unworthy supplicants, having nothing to claim, but only God's grace to plead. Moreover, God will teach us that prayer is not some secret charm that we can use at any moment and forthwith obtain our requests, but that the power of prayer lies in the One to whom we pray. But apart from cause of delay in ourselves, God has His time and His way of answering prayers. If then we pray and watch, and yet have to own with Elijah's servant, "There is nothing," what more can we do? This question receives a very definite answer from Elijah. He says, "Go again seven times." In other words, we must persevere. Not only does the apostle exhort us to pray, but to watch thereunto "with all perseverance." We cannot hurry God. We think of what is agreeable to ourselves; God thinks of what is for His glory and our profit. In the light of this scene we may well challenge our hearts as to whether we are near enough to God to hear His summons to prayer, though all the world may be feasting? And are we prepared for the holy separation for prayer, for humiliation in prayer, and for watching thereunto with all perseverance?

These conditions complied with, may we not count upon an answer to prayer, even though to sight there is little or no sign of the coming blessing? It was thus with Elijah; his perseverance was rewarded. He knew his prayer was about to be answered, though to sight there was but "a little cloud" and that no bigger than "a man's hand." But behind the likeness of a man's hand faith could discern the hand of God. With the greatest confidence Elijah at once sends a message to Ahab saying, "Prepare thy chariot and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not." To natural sight there was no sign of rain: the sky was perfectly clear save for a little cloud no bigger than a man's hand.

But faith knew that God was behind the cloud, and when God is working a little goes a long way. A handful of meal and a little oil with God, can feed a household for a full year. Five barley loaves and two small fishes with God can feed five thousand people, and a little cloud with God behind it can cover the whole heavens. So it came to pass that while Ahab was preparing his chariot "the heavens were black with clouds and wind, and there was great rain."

"And Ahab rode and went to Jezreel." But "the hand of the Lord was on Elijah." The hand of the Lord was with the man who had been with God on the top of the hill. And when the hand of the Lord is upon a man, he will do all things rightly and at the right time. Guided by the Lord, Elijah had stood before the king to rebuke him for his idolatry, and now, still guided by the Lord, the prophet runs before the king to honour and maintain the authority of the king in the eyes of the people. Elijah is instructed to maintain what is due to God while showing the proper respect to man. In season he will manifest his fear of God, and in season he will honour the king.

7 JEZEBEL: THE FLIGHT INTO THE WILDERNESS (1 Kings 19:1-7)

Elijah had witnessed the good confession before the wicked king, the false prophets and the idolatrous nation; now he is called to face the opposition of a very different character, that of the wicked Jezebel. The king was selfish and indolent, seeking only the gratification of his lusts and pleasures and quite indifferent to religion. Jezebel, on the contrary, was a woman of intense energy, a religious fanatic, pursuing idolatry with untiring zeal, protecting the priests of Baal, and persecuting the servants of the Lord. In order to attain her religious ends she sought to wield the secular and regal power of her weak husband. For this reason Jezebel is used by the Spirit of God as the impersonation of a corrupt religious system, energized by Satan, pursuing its way with intense and persistent zeal, always persecuting or endeavouring to seduce the servants of God, and seeking to wield the secular power for its own ends. And just as Jezebel sought to gratify the whims and lusts of Ahab in order to bring him completely under her power, so the papal system, for which Jezebel stands, has sought throughout the centuries to gratify the lusts of kings and statesmen, as well as the mass of men, pandering to their avarice, vanity, and pride, in order to bring both States and individuals under its power. Just as the alliance of Ahab with this wicked woman wrought such trouble in Israel, so, too, the union of Church and State has wrought ruin in that which professes to be the Church of God on earth today (Revelation 2:20-23).

It was the persecuting zeal of this terrible woman, that Elijah had now to meet. His courage failed before the threat of her vengeance, and he fled for his life. Passing through the land of Judah he came to Beersheba, in the extreme south, on the edge of the wilderness. Hitherto he had moved at the word of the Lord, as indeed he could say on Mount Carmel, "I have done all these things at Thy word." On this Journey, however, he was moved by no directing word from the Lord, but rather by a threatening word from a woman. For the moment Elijah had allowed the wicked and powerful Jezebel to come between himself and God. Thus it comes to pass that the man who had stood for God before the king, the false prophet and all Israel, now flees before the threat of a woman. Truly James may say he was a man of like passions with ourselves. In all this Elijah is not thinking of God, or the people of God, but simply of himself. God had led Elijah into the place of public testimony, but for the moment his faith quailed before the opposition that the place entailed. He abandons the path of faith and walks by sight. We read, "When he saw that, he arose, and went for his life." Hitherto Elijah had been sustained in the great dramas in which he had taken part, by

faith’s clear vision of the living God, but under this fresh trial his failing faith loses sight of the living God and he sees only a violent woman. In the presence of her murderous threat, the God that had led and preserved him, the meal that never wasted, the oil that never failed, the power of God that had raised the dead, that brought down the fire from heaven, and that sent the rain, entirely pass from his mind. All is in a moment forgotten, and the prophet can only see an enraged woman and the immediate prospect of a violent death. "And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life." Peter in his day, "when he saw the wind boisterous, was afraid," and began to sink. Walking by sight the greatest of the apostles sinks, and the greatest of prophets flees. Looking at things seen, the man of God is weaker than the man of the world. Only as we walk by faith that sees Him that is invisible, shall we endure amidst the increasing difficulties and the terrifying circumstances of the day in which we live.

"He went for his life." It was not for his God, or for the people of God, or for the testimony of God — but for his life he went. Having only himself in view he fled as far as possible from the place of testimony. He leaves the land of promise, turns his back on the people of God, and flees to Beersheba.

Alas! in the presence of a trial, how quickly we, too, can forget all that the Lord has been for us in the past. The way He has led us, the grace that has preserved us, the heart that has loved us, the hand that has held us, the word that has directed us, all are forgotten in the presence of a trial that is so very real to sight and sense. We see the trial, we lose sight of God. Instead of standing before the living God we flee before some passing trial. We seek to escape the trial, rather than seek the grace of God to sustain in the trial, and to learn God’s mind through it.

Arrived at Beersheba, Elijah left his servant and went a day’s journey into the wilderness. In this solitary place he betakes himself to prayer. But how different this prayer from his former requests. Before, he had prayed for the glory of God and the blessing of the nation; now "he requested for himself." And what a request! He cries out, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers." He has only himself before his eyes. His flight from Jezebel, and his prayer in the wilderness, are full of self. It is "his life" for which he fled, it is "himself" for whom he prays.

All this speaks of the intense despondency of the prophet. He had seen the magnificent display of the power of Jehovah on Mount Carmel, he had seen the people with their faces bowed to the earth owning "the Lord, He is the God." He had executed judgment on the prophets of Baal, he had seen the coming of the rain in answer to his prayer, and doubtless he had expected a great revival of the worship of Jehovah and blessing to Israel, through his ministry. Apparently it had all come to nothing. Elijah was not prepared for this. He had thought that he was better than his fathers, and that under his powerful ministry there would be a true and widespread turning to the Lord, but such was not the case. The years of famine, the destruction of the prophets of Baal, the rain from heaven, all appear to be in vain; so much in vain, indeed, that Elijah — the man that has stood for God — has to flee for his life. Poor Elijah, he could face the king, the prophets of Baal, and all Israel, but he was not prepared to face the failure of his mission. His supreme effort to recall the people to God had been in vain. There was nothing further to be done, his life was a failure. The happiest thing, therefore, would be to die. Thus might he find some rest from fruitless toil and hopeless conflict.

How good to turn from the servant to the perfect Master, and to see His infinite perfection shining out in the day of His rejection. After all His miracles of grace, His words of love, His acts of power, He is despised and rejected, called a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber, and counsel taken to kill Him. In that moment of utter rejection and the apparent failure of all His ministry, He turns to the Father and can say, "I thank thee, O Father . . . even so, Father: for so it seemed good in Thy sight."

Elijah did not die, and never has died. God had another plan for His beloved servant. It was no part of that plan to let His servant pass from this world a disappointed man, under a cloud of depression, dying in some lonely desert. His passage to heaven shall be very different. God's chariot is waiting God's due time to carry him to heaven with glory and honour. In the meantime he is the object of God's tender care. He giveth his beloved sleep; angels shall wait upon him; food shall be provided for him, and his thirst shall be quenched. In the day of faith, the ravens can feed him, and the widow sustain him; in the day of his depression angels wait upon him and God Himself shall feed him. What a God we have to care for us. "His compassions fail not." "Though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies" (Lamentations 3:22, Lamentations 3:32). And this was Elijah's experience; awakened by the angel "he looked and behold, there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head." Moreover, Jehovah of Elijah's day is Jesus of the gospel day, and in like circumstances the wandering disciples may turn aside to fish all night and catch nothing, only to find in the morning the Lord of glory waiting on the needs of His failing servants with the fire of coals, and fish laid thereon, and bread, and a loving invitation to "come and dine."

Thus, too, it is with ourselves. Our faith may grow dim; we may be downcast by reason of the apparent failure of all our service, and in our moments of depression and disappointment we may lose heart and think bitter thoughts, pray unadvisedly, and even murmur at our hard lot, yet God's tender care never ceases; His mercies never fail. Well may we sing:

"O hope of every contrite heart, O joy of all the meet, To those who fall how kind Thou art, How good to those who seek!"

Having refreshed His servant with sleep and food, the Lord gives him fresh directions. He learns that he is on a journey, but, says the Lord, "the journey is too great for thee." What a journey was Elijah's through this world. Cherith, Zarephath, Carmel, Horeb, mark the stages of his journey, and the chariot of fire is ready to end it in power and glory, but every stage was "too great" for Elijah. The power displayed, the courage demanded, the faith required, the opposition to be encountered, the privations to be endured — all were too great for a man of like passions with ourselves. If for one moment Elijah loses sight of the living God; if he fails to walk in daily dependence upon God, immediately he will find that he is no better than his fathers and that the journey is "too great" for him.

It is good for us, as Christians, when we see that our rest is not here. We, too, are on a journey that ends in glory, but a journey in which there are trials to meet, difficulties to overcome, testimony to be borne, and opposition to be faced. For ourselves, also, we may say the journey is "too great" and we are too small for the journey. But if the journey was too great for Elijah, it was not too great for Elijah's God. In tender love God provides for the need of His servant; and "in the strength of that meat" — the meat that God had provided — he went on his journey of forty days

and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God. With God all things are possible. As we view the greatness of the journey and our own littleness, we may well cry out, "Who is sufficient for these things?" But at once the answer comes, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." And so, if all the grace and power of the risen Christ are at our disposal we may well press on "STRONG IN THE GRACE THAT IS IN CHRIST JESUS" (2 Timothy 2:1).

8 HOREB: THE MOUNT OF GOD (1 Kings 19:9-18)

Arrived at Horeb, the Mount of God, the prophet seeks a hiding place in a mountain cave. Again the word of the Lord comes to him with the searching question, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" The prophet had fled from the place of public testimony and active service — fled at the threat of a woman, fled for his life. He had left the path of service with its suffering, opposition, and persecution, and sought a place of safety amidst wilderness solitudes and mountain caves. Now conscience must be probed and account rendered to the Lord for his actions. One has well said, "At Horeb, the Mount of God, all things are naked and open; and Elijah has to do with God, and with God alone."

How hard it is to continue in the path of service when all apparently ends in failure. When there are no immediate results from our labours, when ministry is neglected, the servant slighted and even opposed, then it is we are ready to flee from our brethren, give up active service, and seek rest under some juniper tree, or retirement in some lonely hiding-place. But the Lord loves us too well to let us rest in quiet places of our own choosing. He raises the question in our conscience, "What doest thou here?" No such question was raised in the solitudes of Cherith, or in the home at Zarephath. The prophet was led to the lonely brook and the widow’s home at the word of the Lord; he had fled to the cave at Horeb at the threat of a woman.

Elijah gives a threefold reason for fleeing to the cave. First, he says, "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts." He implies that his zeal for the Lord was all in vain, and hence he had given up all public testimony. Occupation with our own zeal will ever lead to disappointment and discontent with the danger of giving up the path of service.

Then he complains of the people of God. They have forsaken God’s covenants, thrown down His altar, and slain His prophets. This implies that the hopeless condition of the people of God made it useless to continue labouring in their midst.

Lastly, he says, "I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life to take it away." The prophet pleads that he is left alone and the very people before whom he had given such a mighty testimony had turned against him. Hence he had turned his back on them and sought rest and shelter in the lonely cave. The Lord’s question brings to light the true condition of the prophet’s soul, but the prophet has yet to learn the real motive for his flight. It was not at all because his zeal had failed to effect any change; nor was it because of the terrible condition of God’s people, nor yet because they sought his life.

Never was zeal like the zeal of the Lord. He could say, "The zeal of Thine house hath eaten Me up," and yet He had to say, "I have laboured in vain, I have spent My strength for nought and in vain." Never, too, was the condition of Israel more terrible than when the Lord laboured in their midst. Again, how truly the Lord could say in the day of His humiliation, "They seek My life to take it away." But in spite of His zeal and His labour being in vain, in spite of the condition of the people,

and though again and again they sought to take His life, yet He never for an instant swerved from the path of perfect obedience to the Father. He never sought the safe retreat of some lonely cave. He held on His perfect way in the path of obedience to the Father, and unselfish service to men. Do we wish to know the secret of that lovely life? We learn it when we hear Him say, "I have set the Lord always before me: because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved" (Psalms 16:8). Moreover He looked not at the rough ways He had to tread, but at the glorious end of the journey. "My flesh also shall rest in hope . . . Thou wilt show Me the path of life; in Thy presence is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

Elijah had fled, therefore, just because he had failed to keep the Lord always before him; and he looked at the roughness of the way rather than to the glorious end to which it was leading. The failure of his devoted life to effect any change, the evil condition of the people, and the persecution to which he was subjected, would never have moved him from the path of service had he kept the Lord before him. And what matter the roughness of the journey if it ends in being rapt to heaven in a chariot of glory! So the Lord again speaks to Elijah, "Go forth, and stand upon the Mount before the Lord." These words disclose the secret of his failure. Elijah may give many plausible reasons for fleeing to the cave, but the true reason is that he had failed to keep the Lord before him. The secret of the bold witness before Ahab, his power to raise the widow’s son, the power to bring down fire from heaven and command the rain, was simply that he moved and acted in faith before the living God. The secret of his flight, on the other hand, was that he acted in fear before a dying woman. When addressing the apostate king he can say, "The Lord before whom I stand;" when he contemplates the wicked queen it is rather, Jezebel before whom I flee.

Elijah has to learn another lesson if he is to be consciously brought into the presence of the Lord. He had seen the fire descend on Carmel, he had seen the heavens "black with clouds and wind" at the coming of the rain, and Elijah had connected the presence of the Lord with these terrifying manifestations of nature. He had thought that, as a result of these mighty displays of the power of God, the whole nation would turn to God in deep repentance, and for the moment, indeed, they did fall upon their faces and own, "The Lord, He is the God." But no real revival had taken place. Elijah has to learn that wind and earthquake and fire may indeed be God’s servants to awaken men, but unless the "still small voice" is heard, no man is really won for God. The thunder of Sinai must be followed by the still small voice of grace, if the heart of man is to be reached and won. God was not in the wind, the earthquake, or the fire, but in the still small voice.

"And it was so when Elijah heard the still small voice he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entering of the cave." Elijah is in the presence of the Lord, with the immediate result "he wrapped his face in his mantle." Away from the Lord he talks about himself, in the presence of the Lord he hides himself. But there is still pride, bitterness, and anger in his heart, so again the Lord searches him with the question, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" God will have everything laid bare in His presence. Elijah again unburdens his spirit. All that he says is true as to fact, but the spirit in which it is said is wholly wrong. It is easy to discern the wounded pride, the embittered spirit, that lurk behind his words and lead the prophet to speak well of himself and nothing but evil of God’s people. The prophet, having repeated his complaint and shown what is in his heart, has to hear God’s solemn judgment.

First the Lord says, "Go, return on thy way." The prophet must retrace his steps. Then he is to appoint other instruments to carry on the work of the Lord. Had Elijah complained of the evil of the people of God? Now it shall be his sorrowful mission to appoint Hazael king over Syria — an instrument to chastise the people of God. Had Elijah fled from before the threat of the wicked Jezebel? Then he must appoint Jehu to be king over Israel — the instrument to execute judgment upon Jezebel. Had Elijah spoken well of himself, and thought that he only remained? Then he must appoint Elisha to be prophet in his room. Had the prophet, in his complaint, so forgotten God, and all that God was doing in Israel, that he thought he alone was left and that he was the only man by whom God could work? Then he has to learn that God had seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Elijah had indeed been very jealous for God, but he had not been able to discover God's seven thousand hidden ones. He could see the evil of the mass, he could see what God was doing in judgment, but he was unable to discern what God was doing in grace. In the presence of this solemn message the prophet is reduced to silence. He no longer has a word to say for himself. On Carmel he had said before the king and all Israel, "I, even I only, remain a prophet of the Lord;" on Mount Horeb he had twice said in the presence of the Lord, "I, even I only, am left." But at last he has to learn the wholesome lesson that he is only one amongst seven thousand.

Finally we may notice another touching feature in this incident, and that is the considerateness of God's dealings, even at the moment of rebuke.

Another has said, "God acted towards Elijah as towards a beloved and faithful servant, even at the moment in which He made him sensible of his failure in the energy of faith; for He did not make others aware of it, although He has communicated it to us for our instruction."

9 AHAZIAH: THE MESSAGE OF DEATH (2 Kings 1:1-18) As the public ministry of Elijah had opened with a message of judgment to King Ahab, so it closes with a message of death to his wicked son King Ahaziah. Of this man we read, "He did evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of his father, and in the way of his mother, and in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin" (1 Kings 22:52). His character combined the self-indulgence of his father with the fanatical idolatry of his mother. The three and a half years of famine, the exposure of Baal on Mount Carmel, the judgment of the false prophets, the solemn dealings of God with his father, all must have been well known to Ahaziah, but, as far as he was concerned, were all in vain. Heedless of all warnings, "he served Baal, and worshipped him, and provoked to anger the Lord God of Israel, according to all that his father had done."

It is, however, impossible to harden oneself against God and prosper. Troubles gather around the wicked king. Moab rebels, and he himself is prostrated by a fall from an upper chamber in his palace. Will this sickness sober the king and turn his thoughts to the Lord God of Israel? Alas! in prosperity he had lived without God, and in trouble he despises the chastening of the Lord. In health he had served idols with all the fanatical zeal of his mother, and in sickness his depraved mind is unable to escape from their demoniacal power. Instead of turning in contrition to the Lord God of Israel, he inquires of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, whether he will recover.

Ekron was the great heathen oracle of that day — the shrine of the Sidonian god Baal-zebub, literally the god of flies. By his devotees he was reputed to possess power to heal diseases and to cast out demons. Hence, in New Testament times, the Pharisees accuse the Lord of casting out

demons by the power of Beelzebub. Generations before, Saul, in his extremity, had turned to demons, only to hear his immediate doom pronounced by the prophet Samuel. Ahaziah, in his day, repeats the awful sin of King Saul. Overwhelmed by troubles, he too, in the most blatant and public way, affronts the living God by craving the help of demons, and in like manner hears his doom pronounced by the prophet Elijah.

Alas, the men of our day and generation have not taken warning by the solemn example of these royal sinners. On every hand, in the midst of their sore troubles and overwhelming calamities, men are once again stretching out their hands to demons. Having lived without God in the days of their ease and prosperity, unrepentant and refusing to own God in the days of their calamity, they fall under the power of demons. Scientists, novelists, and religious professors are eager in their pursuit of spiritism. Neither intellect, imagination, nor human religion can save from falling under the spell of demons, only to find once again that to trifle with the devil is to seal their doom. "The mystery of lawlessness doth already work." Men, having abandoned God and despised the gospel, are preparing to range themselves under the leadership of "him whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie, that they all might be judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

Apostasy is making way for spiritism, and spiritism is preparing the way for the man of sin whose coming is after the working of Satan. But men forget, even as Ahaziah forgot, that our God is a consuming fire, and that, if men despise His grace and affront His majesty, He will at length bring them into judgment and vindicate His own glory. Ahaziah finds this out to his cost. Instructed by the Angel of the Lord, Elijah intercepts the servants of the king with a message from Jehovah that pronounces his doom. The king shall not rise again from his bed "but shall surely die." As another has said: "Death must vindicate the truth and existence of God when unbelief disowns and disallows all other evidence."

This, then, is Elijah’s last message before he is taken from a scene of guilt to a scene of glory. To the humble widow in her lonely home he had been a "savour of life unto life;" to the apostate king in his godless palace he was a "savour of death unto death."

Having delivered his message he retires to the top of a hill. In moral separation from the guilty world of his day, and spiritually above it, he was unassailable by the hatred of men and the power of demons. Holy, happy separation that witnesses how completely the man of like passions with ourselves has been restored to that quiet confidence which is the proper portion of the man of God. Apostate kings, persecuting Jezebels, Captains and their fifties no longer have any fear for Elijah, as, in calm confidence in the living God, he sits on the top of the hill, waiting for the last great scene in which he shall pass to a home of glory.

How blessed the position of those who in the midst of the fast-approaching apostasy of Christendom can, like Elijah in his day morally apart from this present evil world, calmly rest waiting the great moment when, at the shout of the Lord, they will pass into a scene of glory to be for ever with the Lord. In this position of moral separation Elijah is not only unassailable by his enemies, but the fire of God is at his disposal for their destruction. He finds in very truth that the

Angel of the Lord who sends a message of judgment to the godless king is also the Angel of the Lord who "encampeth round about them that fear Him and delivereth them" (Psalms 34:7). Accordingly, two Captains and their fifties are destroyed by the fire from heaven. The king, realizing that he has to do with a man of no mean power, sends his captains well equipped to make one man comply with his peremptory command. Perfectly unmoved by this military parade and display of numbers, Elijah calmly replies: "If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven and consume thee and thy fifty." If Elijah is a man of God, then God is with Elijah, and Ahaziah has to learn that kings, with all their hosts, have no power against one man if God be with him.

There is, however, a deeper lesson in this great scene. Twice in Elijah's history the fire descends from heaven, but how different the occasions. At Carmel "the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the sacrifice." The fire fell upon the victim as an atonement for the sins of the guilty people, and the people go free — not an Israelite was touched by that fire. In result the people were brought to God; "They fell on their faces: and they said, The Lord He is the God." A foreshadowing of that transcendent moment when Christ also "suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, to bring us to God." Years have passed since the fire fell on the victim at Carmel, and the grace of God that provided a sacrifice, and sheltered the guilty people from the fire of judgment, has been forgotten. The sacrifice has been despised, and now, once again, the fire falls on the hill top. God will again vindicate His glory by the consuming fire. But this time there is no victim between a holy God and a sinful people. The sacrifice has been neglected, and instead of the fire falling upon the victim it falls upon the guilty people in overwhelming destruction. This indeed is but the dim foreshadowing of the doom that awaits this guilty world. For long centuries the good news of forgiveness of sins has been proclaimed through the mighty sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. Men have despised it, until at length, in these favoured lands of Christendom, it is held in all but universal contempt. God is not to be thus mocked; if men despise the judgment of the cross and trample underfoot the Son of God, "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries" (Hebrews 10:26-27). If men will not learn, through the judgment that fell upon Christ when He made the great sacrifice for sin, that God is a God of grace who can forgive, they will have to learn through the judgment that falls upon themselves that God is a consuming fire who takes vengeance upon all those who despise His Son. Yes, let despisers remember that the One who bore judgment upon the Cross, is the One who will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Well indeed, if in the presence of the warnings of God's word, men will follow the example of the third Captain who pleads for mercy and finds it. In this last scene, God publicly owns and uses His restored servant, who fearlessly witnesses for God, and that too in the very city from which he had fled at the threat of a woman. In obedience to the word of the Lord, without trace of fear, this solitary man, escorted by the host of the hostile king, goes down into the stronghold of the foe, there to vindicate the glory of God by repeating the message of death. The apostate king is there, the wicked Jezebel may be there, but no hatred of kings, or threats of violent women, awaken any fear in this restored man who once again walks in confidence in the living God with the world behind him and the glory before him.

Centuries later this last public act in the history of Elijah is recalled by the disciples of the Lord Jesus (Luke 9:51-52). His earthly pathway drawing to its close, the time came that Christ should be "received up." Setting His face stedfastly toward Jerusalem, His road lay through the land of Elijah, and, just as of old these Samaritans had rejected the Lord's servant about to be received up, so now, in like circumstances, they reject the Lord Himself. The everlasting doors were about to open to the King of glory. From the victory of the Cross heaven was ready to receive the Lord mighty in battle, but on earth, we read, "they did not receive Him." The disciples resent the insult put upon their Lord and Master. Little they realized the height of glory into which He was going, little could they see the vista of blessing opened out by His new place in glory. But they loved the Lord, and, as Elijah called down fire from heaven on the insulting Captains, so they would destroy with the fire from heaven these insulting Samaritans. Their request was not morally wrong; affection for the Lord prompted it; righteousness towards Christ's rejectors demanded it, and indeed, as we have seen, the time is coming when the Lord shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire taking vengeance on a Christ-rejecting world. But that time is not yet; between the day when the Lord is received up to heaven and the moment when He comes from heaven in judgment there exists the most wonderful period in the history of the world - the period during which God dispenses grace to this same Christ-rejecting world. It was of this the disciples knew little or nothing. They could understand judgment meted out on earth, but they could not rise to the thought of grace dispensed from heaven. Such, however, is the glorious truth; through the risen Christ, God is proclaiming grace to a world of sinners. "Through this Man is preached . . . the forgiveness of sins" (Acts 13:38).

10 JORDAN: THE CHARIOT OF FIRE (2 Kings 2:1-15) In this strange eventful life Elijah passes from wonder to wonder, and the closing scene is the greatest wonder of all. There is no journey more remarkable than his last day's pilgrimage from Gilgal to Jordan. Led by the Spirit of God he visits places which speak in a striking way of Jehovah's dealing with Israel.

We may first notice that the prophet is accompanied by Elisha, who had been anointed in his room. The time had now come for Elijah to ascend to heaven, leaving Elisha behind to represent on earth the man who is taken to heaven. The starting point of Elisha's ministry is an ascended man. He is to be the witness on earth of the power and grace that can righteously put a man in heaven in spite of sin, death, and all the power of the enemy.

Next we may notice that if the man on earth is to fitly represent the man in heaven he, too, must travel the road that leads by Gilgal, Bethel and Jericho to the banks of Jordan, there to have his vision filled with the glory of the ascension. In these great mysteries we have a striking picture of the true position of the Christian while journeying through this world. If for a while we are left an earth it is that we may represent the Man who has gone to heaven — Christ Jesus, the Man in the glory. What high honour has been put upon us! to remain awhile, as witnesses for Christ, in the world from which He has been rejected. We may fill but a lowly and obscure position in this world, but we are here for a high purpose. Nothing less than to represent Christ in the common round of life. This indeed will brighten the dullest life, and sustain in the saddest life.

Now, in order to be adequate witnesses, we must, in the experience of our souls, know something of the great truths shadowed forth on this last day's journey. We too must travel from Gilgal to Jordan and catch the vision of the ascended and glorified Man, before we can in any measure set

forth His graces and excellencies in a world from which He has been cast out.

Gilgal was the starting place on this memorable day. At Gilgal Israel were separated unto God by circumcision, and there, when circumcised, God could say to the people, "This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you" (Joshua 5:9). There the flesh was cut off, and there the reproach of Egypt was rolled away. At the Red Sea they were delivered from Egypt, but not until they were circumcised on the banks of Jordan was the reproach of Egypt rolled away.

We know from the Epistle to the Colossians that circumcision is typical of the "putting off the body of the flesh." We have been delivered by death from that evil thing which the Word of God calls the flesh. But that deliverance is in the death of Christ, and faith accepts that we have died with Christ. Based upon this great fact we have the exhortation, "Put to death therefore your members which are upon earth" (Colossians 3:5). The Apostle at once tells us what these members are: "fornication, uncleanness, vile passions, evil lusts, and covetousness which is idolatry." Then too, we are to put off "anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communications and lying." It is important to remember that these are not the members of the body, but the members of the flesh. The members of the body we are to yield to God (Romans 6:13); the members of the flesh we are to put to death. Again it is not the flesh that we are exhorted to mortify, but the members of the flesh. The flesh has been dealt with at the cross. This faith accepts, but in our daily walk we are to cut off every evidence of the flesh — those ugly and evil things in which we lived when we were in the world. In the measure in which these things are still seen in us, to that extent the reproach of Egypt still clings to us. For all these things proclaim, not only that we have been in the world, but the manner of life we lived in the world, and therefore become a reproach to us. But if these evidences of the flesh are cut off and no longer seen, then the reproach of Egypt is rolled away, for if these things are gone, no man can tell what manner of men we were when living in the world. This putting to death of the members of the flesh is the Christian’s Gilgal, and just as Joshua, in the course of his victories, returned again and again to Gilgal, so the Christian, after every fresh victory, must beware of the manifestation of the flesh and unhesitatingly refuse it. This is the first stage of the journey and its importance cannot be overestimated. If we are to represent the Man who has gone to heaven, how necessary that very manifestation of the flesh should be absolutely judged and refused.

Bethel is the next stage. The deep significance of this famous place is supplied by the history of Jacob. On his journey from Beersheba to Haran, he lighted on a certain place where he tarried all night. With the earth for his bed and the stones for his pillow, he lay down to sleep. The Lord appeared to him in a dream giving three unconditional promises to this wanderer. (Genesis 28:10-15).

1. As to the Land. It would be given to Jacob and his seed. Israel took possession of the land, and lost the land, on the ground of responsibility. They have never yet possessed it according to this promise on the ground of sovereign grace.

2. As to Israel — the seed of Jacob. They will increase like the dust of the earth and spread abroad to the West and to the East, to the North and to the South, and through Israel all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

3. As to Jacob himself. For twenty years he will be a wanderer facing hardships and dangers, but he is assured by the Lord that He will be with him, and keep him, and bring him again into the land. "I will not leave thee," says the Lord, "until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of."

Thus Bethel testifies to God's unchangeable faithfulness to His people in securing a place for them, in securing them for the place, and in so keeping and caring for each one that none shall perish, however rough and however long the journey may be. As we Christians take our pilgrim journey through this world, how blessed to have the assurance that the home to which we are going is secured to us by the same unchanging faithfulness of God. The Apostle can remind us we are going "to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in the heavens for you." Israel has a land secured on earth, and the Christian a home reserved in heaven. But more, just as Israel is kept for the land, so, too, the Christian is "kept, guarded, by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." And when at last we are gathered home it will be found that not one of His own will be missing. The journey may be long, the way may be rough the opposition great, the conflict fierce — we may often stumble and fall — but the Lord's words to Jacob are applied by the Apostle to ourselves: "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." If Gilgal tells of the unchanging evil of the flesh, every activity of which is to be refused, Bethel speaks of the unchanging faithfulness of God in which our souls can rest in perfect confidence. But in the prophet's day the witness of Gilgal and Bethel to Jehovah's relationship with Israel was but a memory only recalled by faith. To sight, Gilgal and Bethel had become the witness of the people's sin. Amos, the herdsman, charges the people with transgression at Bethel and multiplying transgression at Gilgal. Bethel, as the seat of one of the golden calves, was a centre of idolatry; and while the transgression with idols was universal, at Gilgal it was multiplied. The faith of Elijah looks beyond the awful sin of the nation and recognizes that it is God's purpose to have a people set apart for Himself and brought into blessing on the sole ground of His unchanging faithfulness and unconditional grace.

Similarly in the last days of the Christian dispensation, the cross, which on God's side is the witness of the judgment of the flesh, has become in man's hand an object of universal idolatry, and thus the witness of his sin. How many worship the cross who reject with loathing all that the cross signifies, and hate the Christ who suffered on the cross. Bethel, too, — meaning the house of God — the place of blessing for the display of all that God is in His unchangeable faithfulness, has been degraded into a building of wood and stones to display the pride and glory of man. Nothing either in Elijah's day or our own, so conclusively proves the utter ruin of that which professes the name of God as the corruption of that which is divine. For such there is no hope, and nothing remains but judgment. This is brought before us in the next stage of Elijah's journey. The prophet is sent to Jericho, the city against which God had pronounced the curse. In defiance of God man had rebuilt the city, only to bring judgment upon himself. Thus Jericho becomes the witness of the judgment of God against those who oppose His people and rebel against Himself. The faith of Elijah foresaw that the rebellious nation was going on to judgment, just as faith today discerns that professing Christendom fast hastens to its doom. From Jericho Elijah takes his journey to Jordan. As a type Jordan is the river of death. Through it Israel had passed dry shod into the land, and now once again Elijah and Elisha pass over on dry ground, but for them it is a way of escape from the land that was under judgment. This passage through Jordan becomes the witness that all links are severed between God and Israel on the ground of their responsibility. Judgment is upon them, and

faith recognizes that death is the only way of escape from the coming judgment.

Gilgal tells us that the flesh must be refused and the reproach of Egypt rolled away if Israel is to inherit the land.

Bethel speaks of the sovereign purpose of God to bless His people on the ground of His unconditional grace.

Jericho witnesses that on the ground of responsibility the nation is under judgment.

Jordan, that the only way of escape from judgment is by death. In this mystic journey can we not see the foreshadowing of the perfect path of the Lord Jesus in the midst of Israel? No reproach of Egypt was seen in Him. He walked and lived in the light of the unchanging faithfulness of God to His promises. He warned the nation of coming judgment, and took the way of death which broke all links with Israel after the flesh, and opened a door of escape for His disciples from the judgment that was coming upon the nation. But if, in Elijah, we see shadowed forth the path of the Lord Jesus through this world to heavenly glory, and that by way of death, we see also in Elisha, a picture of the believer who wholeheartedly identifies himself with Christ; who in spirit takes the journey which leads outside this world and who, having seen Christ ascend through the opened heavens into that new place in glory, comes back into a world that is under judgment to witness in grace for the Man that has gone to glory. In Elijah’s day there were many sons of the prophets at Bethel and Jericho, but only one man took the journey with the prophet. The sons of the prophets were exceedingly intelligent, they could tell Elisha what was about to happen, but they had no heart to follow Elijah. And many today know a great deal about Christ, are well instructed in Scripture, but they are not prepared to accept the outside place with Christ and they know little of their place with Christ in heaven. By what power then, we may well ask, is a soul enabled to take this journey? The story of Elisha discovers to us this secret. Another has pointed out some of the steps by which he was led to accompany Elijah. First he was attracted to Elijah. There came a day in his history when Elijah "passed by him" and cast his mantle over him. And was it not a great day in our history when the Lord Jesus drew near to us and we came under the power of His grace and with delight we "ran after" Him? But like Elisha, though we were attracted to Christ there were natural links that held us. Our need and His grace made Christ very attractive but He did not have the first place with us. However, in Elisha’s history there came a time when the natural links were broken and then we read, "He arose and went after Elijah and ministered unto him." It is one thing to be saved by Christ — as it were to be under the shelter of His mantle — but it is another stage in our history when we definitely go forth to serve Him — to minister unto Him. Does this mean that we give up our callings to follow Him, that we turn our backs on home and wife and children? Not necessarily. But it does mean that whereas once we pursued our callings simply with some selfish object, now Christ becomes our object Whereas an unconverted child might obey the parents because it is right to do so and out of natural affection, the converted child will obey because it is pleasing to Christ. And when Christ thus becomes the object it can be truly said we have gone after Him and minister unto Him. But as we follow Christ we grow in the knowledge of Christ, and this leads to a further stage in the history of our souls, we become attached to Him. This is touchingly illustrated in the history of Elisha. Three times on this last day’s journey, he can say to Elijah, "I will not leave thee." This is the language of a heart that is held by affection. And love is put to the test. At Gilgal, Bethel, and Jericho, Elisha is tested by the words of Elijah, "Tarry thee

here, I pray thee," only to be met by the thrice-repeated response, "I will not leave thee." Though Elijah's journey leads to Bethel, the city of the golden calf, to Jericho, the city of the curse, and to Jordan, the river of death, yet Elisha will follow in the power of love. So Ruth could say in an earlier day, "whither thou goest, I will go;" and the twelve could say in a later day, when many turned back and walked no more with Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go?" Grace had drawn them after Christ, and love held them to Christ.

Moreover, attachment of heart leads to full identification with Elijah. Three times on this last day's journey the Spirit of God uses the words "They two," speaking of identification. At Jericho "They two went on." At the river "They two stood by Jordan," and when the waters were smitten, "they two went over on dry ground." Love delights to accept the fact that we have been identified with Christ in the place of judgment and at the waters of death. But more, if we have been identified with Christ in death it is in order that we may hold sweet communion with Him in resurrection, and this too is shadowed forth in this lovely story, for having passed on to new ground through the river of death we read, "They still went on and talked." We may have been converted long years ago, but do we still walk with Christ and talk with Christ as we pass along our way?

How blessedly Elisha points the way by which the believer is led to follow Christ outside this judgment-doomed world into His new place of resurrection glory. Attracted to Him in grace, attached to Him in love, identified with Him in death and enjoying fellowship with Him in resurrection.

Arrived on the other side of Jordan, outside the land, all is at once changed. Not until then does Elijah say, "Ask what I shall do for thee." Grace puts all the power of a risen man at the disposal of Elisha. Death has opened the way for the outflow of sovereign grace. Alas! how little we realize the profound fact that all the grace and power of the risen Christ are at our disposal. What an opportunity for Elisha; he has only to ask to obtain. Does he ask for long life, or wealth, or power, or wisdom? Ah! no; his faith rising above all that the natural heart might covet, at once asks for a double portion of Elijah's spirit. He realizes that if he is to remain on earth in the place of Elijah, he will need the spirit of Elijah. Does not this scene carry our thoughts to the Upper Room of John 14:1-31? The Lord was about to leave His disciples and ascend to glory, and though He does not say, "Ask what I shall do for thee," yet He says, as it were, "I will make a request for you." "I will pray the Father and He shall give you another Comforter that He may abide with you for ever." How slow we are to realize that a divine Person has gone up to heaven and a divine Person has come down from heaven to dwell in believers. And the Person who has come down is as great as the Person who has gone up. If we are left on this earth to be descriptive of Christ as the exalted Man, we shall need, as one has said, "a power commensurate with Himself."

Elisha had asked a hard thing, nevertheless it shall be granted if, says Elijah, "thou see me when I am taken from thee." "And it came to pass, as they still went on and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven, and Elisha saw it." He sees Elijah ascend into glory, but on earth he sees him "no more." "Yea," says the Apostle, "though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more." And what is the result for the Apostle of seeing Christ in the glory? He answers, "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature, old things are passed away; behold all things are become new." And this, too, is told out in this wonderful story, for we read that

Elisha "took hold of his own clothes and rent them in two pieces." But further, not only does he part with the "old things," but he makes them useless. He did not carefully fold and lay them aside, ready to be taken up again at some future time, but "he took hold of his own clothes and rent them in two pieces." He has done with them for ever. Henceforth he is clothed in the mantle of Elijah. But it is the mantle of the man who has gone to heaven by way of Jericho and Jordan. In figure he has gone through judgment and death, and as a result God is free to send back Elisha with a message of grace to a nation that is under judgment. But for this witness to have any power, he must be a true representative of the man in heaven. How blessedly this was so in Elisha’s case, for on his return to Jericho from the scene of the rapture, the sons of the prophets at once exclaim, "The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha. And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him." In like manner, having seen Christ on high, and our vision being filled with new creation glories, it is our privilege to part company with the "old things," and in the power of "the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" so to represent the Man that has gone to heaven, that the very world is constrained to note that we have been "with Jesus," even as in Elisha’s day they said, "The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha."

S. Elisha: "The Man of God."

Elisha: "The Man of God."

Hamilton Smith.

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PREFACE The meaning of the name Elisha is "God the Saviour;" and, in conformity with his name, he was used, above all prophets in Old Testament days, to set forth the sovereign grace and mercy of God to a guilty people. In his day the Rulers, and institutions of the land in the hands of the Priesthood, had entirely failed to maintain the people in relationship with God. The warnings of Elijah had failed to recall the people to God. Thus, the utter ruin of God's people being manifested, God falls back upon His own sovereignty and raises up a man who, independent of the sacred and divinely appointed temple, and the official and divinely appointed Priesthood, goes through the Land of the apostate ten tribes performing miracles of mercy, and dispensing the grace of God to all who have faith to avail themselves of it.

Thus, in the history of Elisha, we see an illustration of the important principle that though God appoints institutions for His people to observe, He is not bound by them, nor limited to them, if man fails in his responsibility. In all these ways of sovereign grace Elisha has the high honour of foreshadowing the coming of Christ, the Anointed of God, who, in His day, went about doing good, apart From the authority of Priests and Rulers, asserting the sovereign right of God to rise above the institutions of the law, such as the Sabbath, in order to show grace to sinners.

INTRODUCTION

Never, in the course of Israel's history, had the moral condition of the nation been so low as in the reign of king Ahab. Of this weak and wicked man we read, that he "did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him." The law was broken. The worship of idols was all but universal: men bowed down to the golden calves at Bethel and Dan: false prophets conducted their idolatrous rites in Jehovah's land. Under the leadership of the king, and his idolatrous wife, the nation had apostatized from Jehovah, and proved itself ripe for judgment.

Nevertheless, God lingers over this judgment-doomed nation. Instead of overwhelming the people with the judgment they deserve, God sends His prophet Elijah to expose their true condition and recall them to Himself. The life and miracles of Elijah had been one long witness against the nation's utter apostasy from the moral law and the worship of Jehovah. The years of drought, the fire from heaven, the destruction of the prophets of Baal, the judgment of the Captains and their Fifties, the doom pronounced against the king in the vineyard of Naboth, and the letter to the apostate king of Judah, foretelling a coming plague, were all solemn denunciations of prevailing evils.

Alas! the ministry of Elijah only brought to light the utter ruin of the nation in responsibility. It clearly showed that, not only the nation had broken the law, and sunk into idolatry, but that prophecy — which recalls a failing people to God — was entirely powerless to effect any restoration. In spite of a ministry accompanied by the warning signs of a famine on earth, and fire from heaven, the prophet of God is rejected by a blinded and idolatrous nation. Having fulfilled his ministry, the faithful but rejected prophet forsakes the land of Israel by way of Jordan — the river of death — and is taken to heaven by the whirlwind.

Thus as far as Israel is concerned, all is over. The nation has utterly failed to secure, or maintain, the blessing of God on the ground of the fulfilment of its responsibilities. Apparently nothing remains but the execution of the judgment they deserve. Here, however, we are permitted to see the wonders of the ways of God. For God uses the wickedness of man to disclose the resources of His own heart. Man had utterly failed, and God had shown that He is not indifferent to sin, and in His own time must act in Judgment. Nevertheless, God is sovereign, and reserves to Himself His sovereign rights of grace. Thus it comes to pass, that instead of cutting off the nation in judgment, God falls back on His sovereign grace. On the one hand He secures for Himself a remnant that have not bowed the knee to Baal; on the other hand He sends to a guilty nation a ministry of grace for every one who has faith to avail himself of grace. This ministry, being a ministry of grace, cannot be confined to the bounds of Israel. Its source lies outside the land, and, while sent to Israel, is available to the Gentile.

Elisha is the chosen vessel to carry this new ministry of grace to a ruined world. As one has said Elisha "completes by a ministry of grace in the power of life, what Elijah had begun in righteousness against idolatry." Elisha returns to the land that Elijah had left. The curse was there; widows are in need; hunger and famine are in the land; enemies oppose and death is over all. Into this scene of sin and ruin Elisha comes with power from on high, to display, in the midst of a dark world, the grace of heaven that can meet the need of man. Thus it comes to pass as Elisha passes on his way, the curse is removed; the needs of the widow are met; the barren woman becomes fruitful; the dead are raised; evil is averted; the hungry are fed; the leper is healed; enemies are baffled and defeated; earth's famine yields before heaven's plenty, and out of death there comes forth life.

Thus it becomes manifest that the ministry of Elisha wears an entirely different character to that of his great forerunner. Moreover, the manner of life of the two prophets, while in keeping with their respective ministries, was of necessity wholly different. Elijah led a life, for the most part, remote from the haunts of men: Elisha moved among the masses, on familiar terms with his fellow-men. Elijah was found by lonely streams, in desert ways and mountain caves: Elisha is found in the

cities of men, and the camps of kings. Elijah is entertained by a humble widow of Sarepta: Elisha is the guest of the rich woman of Shunem.

These differences of life and manners were right and beautiful in their season. It was fitting that the one who has been rightly described as "the sworn enemy of all persons and institutions which interfered with the honour of the Lord God of Israel," should lead a life of strict separation from the nation that he so sternly condemned. Equally right that the one whose great mission is to declare the mercy of God to a guilty world, should freely move amongst his fellow men.

Nevertheless, the prophets were alike in their holy separation from the evils of the times. If Elisha moves amongst his fellow men as the intimate of kings and, at times, the companion of the great of the earth, he is wholly apart from the evil of their lives. He brings mercy to the guilty but walks apart from their guilt. He enriches others with the blessings of heaven, though content to remain a poor man on earth. As another has so truly said ," It was for others he occupied his resources and strength in God. He was rich, but not for himself. Thus — he meets the inconveniences of nature; — without a purse he relieves the poor; — without a commissariat he feeds armies — the deadly thing he makes harmless; — without bread he gives food to a multitude, and gathers fragments; — without medicine he heals disease; — without armies or soldiers, he defeats enemies; — in famine he supplies a nation; — though dead he communicates life." May we not add that, in all these shining ways of grace, Elisha is leading our thoughts to that far greater One who became poor that we through His poverty might be rich. In the spirit of Elijah, the great forerunner of Christ had dwelt in desert places, there to bring to light a godly remnant, and there to denounce the evils of a wicked and adulterous generation. Thus he prepared the way of the Lord, who, as the Son of Man, came "eating and drinking" with the children of men, as He moved amongst the needy crowds, dispensing the grace of God in a ruined world.

1. THE CALL OF ELISHA 1 Kings 19:14-21

Elisha is first brought to our notice in the Lord’s charge to Elijah, in the day of the prophet’s despondency. Disappointed at the failure of his mission, embittered against the professing people of God, and occupied with himself, Elijah had, with a wounded spirit, spoken well of himself and nothing but evil of God’s people. He imagined that he alone was standing for God, and that the entire nation was against him, seeking his life to take it away.

Elijah has to learn that the Lord has other instruments to carry out His government; other servants to maintain a witness for Himself; and, amongst the people of God, seven thousand that have not bowed the knee to Baal. Thus it comes to pass that Elijah has to retrace his steps from Horeb and anoint Elisha, the son of Shaphat, as prophet in his room.

How often in our own day, with its increasing corruption, we, with our limited outlook, may be led to imagine that the work of God depends upon one or two devoted and faithful servants of the Lord, and that with their removal all testimony for the Lord will cease. We have to learn that though servants pass God remains, and that God has other servants in preparation for His service, and, unknown to us, God has His hidden ones who have not bowed down to prevailing evils. In obedience to the Lord’s word, Elijah departs from Horeb to seek Elisha. The one chosen to take the place of the prophet is not found amongst the great men of the earth. God is no respector of persons, and in choosing His servants God is not restricted to the great and noble. He may indeed

employ the rich and the learned, kings and priests, as He sees fit. But at times He pours contempt on all our pride by taking up a man from the humblest walks of life to perform the highest spiritual service. He can use a little maid to bless a great man; He can take a lad from the sheepfolds to be the leader of His people Israel; He can use the betrothed of a carpenter to bring into this scene the Saviour of the world; and having brought the Saviour into the world, He can use some lowly fishermen to turn the world upside down. Thus it comes to pass, in the days of Elijah, He calls a simple husbandman from following the plough to be the prophet of his age.

Moreover, those that God calls to His service, are not the idle and ease-loving men of the world. Elisha is patiently pursuing his calling "ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth," when the call comes. So David, in an earlier day, was keeping the sheep when called to be the king. And the disciples of a later day were casting their nets into the sea, or mending nets, when called to follow the King of kings.

It is upon this busy man that Elijah casts his mantle, an act that may signify that Elisha is called to take the place, exhibit the character, and act in the spirit of its owner. And thus the spiritual instincts of Elisha would appear to interpret the act, for we read, "He left the oxen and ran after Elijah." If, however, there is a divinely given readiness to follow Elijah, there is a natural reluctance to leave his loved ones. So he can say, "Let, me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee." Elijah’s answer throws the responsibility of responding to God’s call entirely upon Elisha. "Go back again," he says, "for what have I done to thee?" He will use neither force nor command. No pressure shall be put on Elisha: he is left to discern the import of Elijah’s action, and he is free to "go back" to his loved ones, or go forward with the rejected and persecuted prophet.

If Elisha’s actions betray some looking back to the things that are behind, they also prove him to be an overcomer that celebrates his surrender of his things by providing a feast for others. In his day and measure, as one has remarked, he sold what he had and gave to the poor. Having thus finished with his earthly calling, "he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him." The man that had hitherto patiently pursued the daily round, toiling in the field, is now to be prepared to set forth the wonders of God’s grace by following Elijah as his servant and companion.

2. THE SERVANT’S TRAINING 2 Kings 2:1-14

We hear nothing of Elisha from the time of his call, until the day when Elijah is translated. This we can understand, seeing that Elisha was anointed to be the prophet in the room of Elijah. The two ministries could not co-exist. When, however, the end of Elijah’s pilgrimage is reached, Elisha comes to the front as the companion of his last journey and the witness of his rapture. As we follow these men of God in these mystic scenes, does it not become clear that the circumstances connected with Elijah’s translation to heaven, become Elisha’s preparation for service on earth?

How often we are permitted to see, in Scripture, that God trains in secret those whom He purposes to use in public. Joseph has his secret training with God in prison, before he can be a public witness for God in the palace. For forty years Moses keeps the flock of Jethro at the back of the desert, before he becomes the leader of God’s flock through the desert. Unknown to others, David overcomes the lion and bear, before he publicly enters into conflict with the giant. So Elisha must have his training as the servant and companion of Elijah, before he can take his place as the

prophet of God and the witness of grace. Thus only will he be a vessel and fit for the Master's use and prepared unto every good work. In this last journey there are scenes to be visited, tests to be faced, and lessons to be learnt. The places visited, so famous in Israel's history with God, must surely have had deep significance for Elisha as indeed for all who would serve the Lord.

Gilgal, the starting point of their journey, was the place of Israel's first encampment in the land, after their passage of the Jordan. There the people were circumcised, and there the Lord could say to Joshua, "This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you" (Joshua 4:19; Joshua 5:2-9). In the light of Christianity we are privileged to enter into the spiritual meaning of circumcision. From the Epistle to the Colossians we understand that this rite sets forth the judgment of the body of the flesh in the death of Christ, and the believer's practical mortification of the flesh (Colossians 2:11; Colossians 3:5). Not only has God dealt with the believer's sins, but, at the cross, God has dealt with the old man that produced the sins. God's abhorrence of the flesh, His judgment upon the flesh, and His sentence of death against the flesh, have all been expressed in, and borne by, Christ on the cross. So the believer can say, "Our old man has been crucified with Christ." On the ground of what God has wrought through Christ, the believer is exhorted to "mortify" every form in which the flesh may seek to show itself. We are to treat every expression of the flesh as a member of that "old man" upon which death has been executed. If the flesh is thus judged the reproach of Egypt will be rolled away from us. It will no longer be manifest that we have ever been in the world; the manner of life we lived when in the world will no longer be allowed or seen. How deeply important that we should learn, and put in practice, this first great lesson, if we, in our day, are to be, in any sense, in the room of the glorious Man that has gone to heaven.

Bethel was the second stage of the journey — a place famous in the history of the patriarch Jacob (Genesis 28:15-19). There the Lord appeared to poor failing Jacob in the dreary place where his sin had cast him, and in sovereign grace blessed him unconditionally. For twenty years Jacob was to be a wanderer in strange lands; but he is assured that God will be with him, God will keep him, God will bring him again to the Land, and that God will be true to His word. Thus Elisha, at the commencement of his ministry, is assured, like Jacob of old, that he is blessed by the sovereign grace of a faithful God of which he is to become the witness. Good too if we take our pilgrim journey in all the blessed assurance that God is with us, will support us, and bring us at last to see for ourselves that what His love has purposed for us is the only thing worth living for.

Jericho is the next halting place in this remarkable journey. It was by Jericho that Joshua had the revelation of the Captain of the host of the Lord, with the drawn sword. At Jericho, too, the people first encountered the enemy that barred their entrance to the Land; there to learn that the Captain of the Lord's host was mightier than all the power of the enemy (Joshua 5:13-15). Good for the man who is going to witness before kings and face their murderous hatred, to be reminded that in fighting the Lord's battles he will be supported by the Lord's host directed by the Captain of the host. And so, in after years, Elisha found, when besieged in Dothan by a host with horses and chariots, that the power for him was greater than the host of the Syrians that encompassed him, for "Behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire." In this the Christian day, it is still our privilege to take our journey to glory, and face every enemy, that disputes our present possession and enjoyment of God's purpose for us, under the leadership of the Captain of our salvation (Hebrews 2:10). The last stage of this notable journey is reached at Jordan, the river that is such a constant type of actual death by which all links with the world are broken. Both Elijah and

Elisha cross it, indeed, dry shod; but typically they pass through death, one to ascend to heavenly scenes, the other to witness of heavenly grace in a world to which in spirit he is dead.

Thus, may we not say, that through these notable places, Elisha is reminded, and we are to learn, at Gilgal the holiness of God that demands the judgment of the flesh; at Bethel the unchanging grace of God which blesses us, keeps us, and secures to us the end of our journey; at Jericho the mighty power of God by which we are sustained; and at Jordan, of separation from the world that we may enter upon heavenly ground and become the witnesses of a heavenly life that, setting forth the grace of God, can say, "Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants?" (2 Kings 5:26).

Furthermore, not only is Elisha reminded of great truths at the different stages of this last journey, but his affections are put to the test by Elijah's thrice repeated words, "Tarry here, I pray thee." The instructions to go forward to these different places were given to Elijah. No command was given to Elisha to accompany him. If then he follows Elijah it is wholly a question of affection. And the test draws out his affection, for three times Elisha replies, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." Has this no voice for believers in this our day? Is it not by affection for Christ that we are moved to learn the lessons that come before us in the different stages of this striking journey? The doctrine of God's judgment on the flesh, must first be learned as the starting point of our identification with Christ; for who can walk with Christ with unjudged flesh? But can it be learnt otherwise than by hearts that are set upon Christ? Then, too, the truth of the House of God, set forth by Bethel, discovering to us the purpose of God, can only be learnt by a heart that longs to know the mind of Christ. Further, God's judgment on the world system, set forth in Jericho, can only be entered into by one, who in mind and affection is set upon another world. Lastly, the lesson of Jordan — the waiving and setting aside of the earthly order in favour of a present heavenly order of things, calls for a love that can overcome the land that flows with milk and honey, by being set upon the Man, that has gone to heaven.

Moreover, there were those who twice reminded Elisha that the Lord was about to take away his master. These sons of the prophets, with more knowledge than heart, would only hinder Elisha's communion with his master, by occupying him with himself and his loss. Elisha silences these intrusions upon his soul's communion by saying, "I know it; hold ye your peace." He says, as it were, "Why should I not go with my lord Elijah and learn what it means to be in his company at Gilgal? Why should I not learn with him the lesson of Bethel? Why should I be parted from him, when passing through Jericho? Why should I not be identified! with him in his passage through Jordan, even if it means leaving behind the earthly blessings of the Land, to be found with him in the outside place of reproach; for beyond the place of reproach there is another scene, a heavenly scene, and my affections are captured by the one that is going into that new scene?"

Thus the last stage of the journey is reached. Intruders have been silenced, affections have been kindled, leading Elisha to cleave to his master through all these changing scenes. The parting moment has come; Elijah is about to be rapt to heaven; Elisha, bereft of his master, is to be left behind in an apostatizing religious nation, who once were Jehovah's people. In this solemn moment Elijah utters his final word, "Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee." Could this offer have been made before? Is it not, as it were, the supreme test for Elisha?

Will not the answer make manifest whether Elisha has entered into the spirit of his call? Whether he has profited by his companionship with Elijah? Whether, above all, he has learnt the lessons of Gilgal, Bethel, Jericho, and Jordan? Will it not make manifest whether Elisha has before him earthly gain, fleshly ambition, and worldly power, or is his sole purpose henceforth to be in the prophet's room, and witness to the sovereign grace of God as the representative of man that has gone to heaven?

Very blessedly Elisha's answer discloses his single-hearted devotedness. He asks for neither long life, nor earthly riches, nor worldly fame. He covets none of those things the natural man values, but rather that which the spiritual man needs; for he says, "Let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." This by no means implies that he asks for twice as much gift, or power, as Elijah possessed. The Hebrew word implies the double portion of the elder son (Deuteronomy 21:17). Only Elisha asks not for a double portion of material wealth, but for a double portion of spiritual power. Other prophets will need spiritual power, but, if Elisha is anointed to take the place of Elijah — to be in his room — then, indeed, he will require a spiritual power twice as much as that of any other prophet.

Elijah replies, "Thou hast asked a hard thing." To gain riches, and fame, and worldly power, may entail toil and vexation of spirit, but they are not "hard" things, for men of the world can obtain these material advantages. To obtain, or confer, spiritual power is entirely outside the capabilities of the natural man. Nevertheless, says Elijah, "If thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not it shall not be so." The granting of his request for a double portion of spiritual power, is made to turn upon Elisha seeing Elijah in his new position as the ascended man. The sight of Elijah in heaven will be the secret of Elisha's power on earth.

Herein, surely, are mysteries of which Christianity has revealed the spiritual meaning. For do we not know that faith's vision of Christ in the glory is the secret of power for the Christian on earth? Was it not strikingly so in the case of the first Christian martyr, for looking up steadfastly into heaven he could say, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God." In the light of that vision Stephen was so endued with power from on high that, like his Master, he can pray for his murderers, and, amidst the falling stones, calmly commit his spirit to the Lord Jesus. So, too, the Apostle of the Gentiles, commences his Christian career with the sight of Christ in the glory; and in the light of that vision he walked as a witness for Christ on earth through all the years of his devoted life. For ourselves does not the same Apostle tell us that, "We all looking on the glory of the Lord with unveiled face are transformed according to the same image from glory to glory" (2 Corinthians 3:18)? We must catch the vision of the Lord in glory, if in any sense we are to represent on earth that blessed and perfect Man who has gone to glory. So it came to pass, "as they still went on and talked, that, behold there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven." Elisha saw it, and cried, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen there

Nothing quite like this great scene had ever taken place on earth. As one has said, "It is far above the silent removal of Enoch, and far below the calm majesty, of the ascension, when no chariots of fire were needed to sweep the Risen Body of the Redeemer from the earth: when as they beheld, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight."

If, however, Elisha sees his master ascend to heaven, we also read, "He saw him no more." He sees him in the heavens to which he had ascended, but on earth he sees him no more. Has this no voice for the Christian? Does not the Apostle say, "Henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more" (2 Corinthians 5:16)? Words that by no means imply that we are not to consider Christ in His path through this world, and learn of Him, as we delight our souls in His lowly grace, His tender love, and infinite holiness. They plainly tell us, however, that we are no longer to know Him in connection with Israel and this world. We are, rather, to know Him as the Leader of a heavenly band, and in heavenly relationships. Devoted but ignorant disciples, may say, "We trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel." Corrupt Christendom may attempt to connect the Name of Christ with their schemes for the improvement of man and the betterment of the world; but the Christian taught in the mind of the Lord will take his place outside the world, while pressing on to Christ in glory, refusing to connect Christ with a world that nailed Him to the cross. The result of thus knowing Christ in His new place in heaven is very happily set forth in picture in the case of Elisha. The vision of the ascended Elijah leads to a twofold action on his part. First "he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in pieces"; an act that signifies the laying aside of one character in order to exhibit a character that is entirely new, for the garment speaks of the practical righteousness of the saints and the character they exhibit before the world. Elisha did not simply lay them aside to be taken again on certain occasions; he made them useless for future wear by rending them in twain. Then, secondly, "He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him." Henceforth he will exhibit the character of the man that has gone to heaven. So, too, the Apostle after saying we know Christ no more after the flesh, can go on to say, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away: behold, all things are become new." At once Elisha acts in the power of the new life. He comes back into a ruined nation, guilty of having broken the law, defiled by idolatry, and apostate from Jehovah, and in the midst of this scene of wretchedness and desolation he presents the sovereignty of God rising above all man’s sin, and acting in the supremacy of grace for those who have faith to avail themselves of blessing on the ground of grace.

3. THE SONS OF THE PROPHETS 2 Kings 2:15-18. The blessed effects of Elisha’s training are now made manifest to others. He becomes a witness before the world of the one that has gone to heaven. The sons of the prophets take note of his new character; for, looking upon Elisha, they say, "The spirit of Elijah doth rest upon Elisha." They look at a man on earth, and they see the spirit and character of a man in heaven. Has this no voice for us in this Christian day? Does this not set forth in picture our highest privilege and responsibility as Christians? For are we not left on earth to represent the Man in the glory? Paul could speak of the Corinthian saints as being "Christ’s epistle" known and read of all men. The Spirit had written Christ in their hearts, and, in the measure in which the Spirit read Christ in their hearts, the world read Christ in their lives.

Alas! are we not too often like the sons of the prophets, who could appreciate the spirit of Elijah in another, though exhibiting little of this spirit in themselves? They had a measure of knowledge, for they knew when the moment had come for Elijah to be rapt to heaven, but they had no heart to follow in that last journey. They stood to view "afar off"; they watched the prophet go down to Jordan, they never, like Elisha, went through Jordan. They never walked and talked with Elijah beyond Jordan. They never beheld the chariot of fire, and horses of fire, nor did they see the

prophet rapt to heaven by a whirlwind.

Nevertheless they recognise, with a measure of appreciation, the blessed effects upon the man that has seen these wonders. They bow themselves to the ground before him, and thus show that they see, in Elisha, one who moves on a higher spiritual level than themselves. They are willing to take the place of servants to one whom they recognise as servant of the Lord. Are we not oftentimes like these men? We see that Christ has died for us; we are slow to accept His death as our death. We know perhaps little of a walk in communion with Him on resurrection ground, and what it is to behold Him as a living Man in the glory. Yet we can appreciate in others the effect of this personal intimacy with Christ. For there is no gainsaying the man who is characterized by the spirit of the Man that has gone to heaven. The world could take knowledge of Peter and John, "that they had been with Jesus "; and looking upon Stephen they "saw his face as it had been the face of an angel," and "were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake" (Acts 4:13; Acts 6:10, Acts 6:15). Not only, however, were the sons of the prophets dull of heart, but they were slow of apprehension, and worse they were marked by unbelief. And yet withal they had a great show of natural strength: they have their "fifty strong men." But the thoughts of nature cannot rise above the mountains and valleys of earth. Only faith’s trans-piercing gaze can see the vision of the man in heaven.

Thus unbelief is the first characteristic of the sphere in which Elisha is to be a witness; and this is found in those who make a religious profession. Nature cannot believe that the grace of God can take a man to heaven, though ready to suggest that the Spirit of God can take a man up to cast him down to earth. They knew, indeed, that Elijah was to be taken away, but apparently they did not believe that he was taken to heaven. They had knowledge, but they lacked faith. Elisha, ashamed of their unbelief, allows them to prove the vanity of their natural resources, by sending their fifty men on a fruitless three days search 4. THE MEN OF THE CITY 2 Kings 2:19-22. The world in the midst of which Elisha is a 1 witness to the grace of God is not only an unbelieving world, but, as the result of its unbelief, is a world under the curse. Very fittingly then Elisha’s mission of grace commences at Jericho, the place of the curse. Joshua had said, "Cursed be the man before the Lord that riseth up and buildeth this city of Jericho: he shall lay the foundation thereof in his firstborn, and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it." So it came to pass, for in the days of Ahab, a man arose who defied the Lord by building Jericho, with the loss of his two sons "according to the word of the Lord that he spake by Joshua" (Joshua 6:26; 1 Kings 16:31). The situation was pleasant, but the water was bad and the ground barren. Such is this world; at times outwardly fair, but over all the blight of the curse. Its sources of refreshment fail to satisfy. It promises much but brings nothing to fruition. It cannot meet the needs of man.

Elisha, however, is present with healing grace; a beautiful picture of Christ who, having nothing of this world’s goods, yet dispenses blessing on every hand, using His grace for the good of others. The men of the city have faith to avail themselves of the grace that is in Elisha. They come to him with their need. The prophet asks for a new cruse and salt therein, speaking of the preserving character of grace linked, not with the flesh, but with a "new vessel." Was not Christ the "new vessel" filled with the preserving grace of God?

Then we read, Elisha "went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in there, and said, Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more death or

barren land." So will it be in the days yet to come: in the very scene where the curse was pronounced, where the curse has fallen, there the curse will be removed. God will dwell with men — new vessels, made like to Christ filled with preserving grace. Then indeed there will be no more death nor curse, for the former things will have passed away.

5. THE MOCKERS OF BETHEL 2 Kings 2:23-25. In reading the story of Elisha it must ever be remembered that his mission was to present the grace of God to a guilty nation. For this reason his miracles are almost without exception miracles of grace. The three exceptions — the mocking youths who are cursed, Gehazi who is stricken with leprosy, and the death of the lord on whose hand the king leaned, are in perfect keeping with the prophet's mission. In every case the judgment is the direct outcome of slighting grace.

Thus while witness is given to God's sovereign grace in a number of striking miracles, there is also a witness to the inevitable judgment that will overtake those who reject, or falsify, or slight, the grace of God. At the beginning of his ministry Elisha has to learn that if he brings grace and blessing into the scene of the curse, he will be confronted by those who reject grace, and mock at the vessel of grace. Thus it comes to pass as the prophet went up to Bethel, he is met by a band of youths who mock at the ascension of Elijah. In derision they say to Elisha, "Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head. The sons of the prophets betray ignorance and unbelief as to the ascension. The "men of the city" may be indifferent to ascension, but the children of Bethel mock at ascension. In Bethel, the place that was distinguished in the history of Israel as the house of God, we find a band of mockers. Nor is it otherwise in this day of grace. There is still ignorance and unbelief in the religious circle, and indifference among the men of the world, but the most terrible mark of the last days will be the appearance of scoffers in the Christian profession — that which professes to be the house of God. For such there is nothing but judgment, — a judgment that begins at the house of God (2 Peter 3:3; 1 Peter 4:17).

Thus it was in the day of Elisha. The ascension of Elijah to heaven, the double portion of the spirit that rests on Elisha, the activities of grace for the blessing of man, are merely subjects for sport. The solemn result is that the one who is the minister of grace invokes the judgment upon those who reject it.

6. THE KINGS AND THEIR ARMIES 2 Kings 3:1-27

Hitherto Elisha has been the minister of grace in a limited circle: he now commences his public ministry in connection with the apostate nation. Through his intervention, three kings and their armies are saved from destruction, and a great victory gained over the enemies of God's people. The whole scene vividly portrays the low and humiliating condition of the professing people of God. Jehoram, the king of the ten tribes, though putting away certain idols, wrought evil in the sight of the Lord, and departed not from the sins of Jeroboam which made Israel to sin. In the government of God, Moab is allowed to rebel. To quell this rebellion Jehoram seeks the aid of the king of Judah. Jehoshaphat, himself a God-fearing man, falls into the snare. He abandons godly separation, enters into an unholy alliance with Jehoram, and thus sinks to the level of this wicked king. He joins with him to fight his battles, saying, "I will go up, I am as thou art, my people as thy people, and my horses as thy horses."

Moreover, both these kings — who profess the worship of Jehovah — are found in alliance with the heathen king of Edom, an enemy of God. Thus we have the strange alliance of a wicked king, a God-fearing king, and a heathen king.

Without thought of God or reference to God, these three kings make their plans, and proceed to put them into practice. All seems to promise well until, at the end of seven days, they are confronted with circumstances that threaten their destruction, not by hand of the enemy, but from lack of water.

Stirred by an uneasy conscience, the king of Israel sees in these circumstances the hand of the Lord, who, he assumes, has called together these three kings to deliver them into the hands of Moab. If, however, the trial arouses the guilty fears of the apostate king, it also manifests the God-fearing character of the king of Judah. Both kings think of the Lord; one can only see in the trial that the Lord is against them in judgment; the other sees in the trial an occasion to turn to the Lord as their only resource. Jehoshaphat says, "Is there not here a prophet of the Lord, that we may enquire of the Lord by him?" Far better had he enquired of the Lord before starting on this expedition in company with the king of Israel. However, faced with the terrible circumstances, he is recalled to the Lord. This enquiry brings Elisha to the front. The prophet’s first words bear a bold witness against the wicked king of Israel, with whom he refuses to be associated, for, he asks, "What have I to do with thee?" This question is not only an exposure of the apostasy of the king of Israel, but a rebuke to the king of Judah, Jehoshaphat, a true saint, but who, walking according to the flesh, had formed an unholy alliance with Jehoram, and said, "I am as thou art, and my people as thy people." Elisha, walking according to the spirit of Elijah, refuses all association with Jehoram, saying, "What have I to do with thee?"

Doubtless, the king of Judah would never have consented to bow down with Jehoram before the golden calves. Nevertheless, he is ensnared into joining with one to fight the Lord’s enemies with whom he cannot worship. Alas! how often in Christian days, has this scene been re-enacted. Under the plea of love, and helping in the service of the Lord, the believer has been drawn into association with those with whom he could not join in worship before the Lord. Such alliances set the blessing of men above the honour of the Lord. Are we not thus warned against the easy-going kindness of human nature that can at times betray us into thoughtlessly saying to those who are in a false position, I am as thou art, my people as thy people"? Again does not this scene warn us to "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation"? Not only to "watch" against the snares of the enemy, but to "pray," so that every step is taken in dependence upon God. It is well that we turn to God when a false step has plunged us into difficulty; but better far to walk in the spirit of prayer and dependence, and thus escape every crooked path.

Elisha, while refusing all association with Jehoram, and indirectly rebuking Jehoshaphat, does not hesitate to link himself with what is of God, and with the man that is in any little measure standing for God. He thus regards the presence of Jehoshaphat; otherwise he would not have looked toward the king of Israel, nor seen him.

None the less, the confusion caused by this unholy alliance between the two kings, is so great, that Elisha is hampered in discerning the mind of the Lord. Hence he calls for a minstrel. His mind must be diverted from all that is around him, and put in touch with heavenly scenes to know the Lord’s mind. No minstrel was needed to condemn the apostate king of Israel, nor rebuke the folly

and weakness of the king of Judah; when, however, it is a question of discerning the mind of heaven, then at once there is the need of the minstrel. The man of God must have his mind diverted from the utter confusion around, the destruction with which God's people are faced, and the consequent distress into which they are plunged. He cannot learn the mind of the Lord by dwelling upon the sorrowful circumstances. He is not indifferent to them; he does not ignore them; but if he is to learn how the Lord would have him to act he must be lifted above the distressing circumstances of an earthly scene into the serene calm of that heavenly scene into which Elijah had ascended, and from which Elisha had come forth to minister the sovereign grace of God in the midst of a ruined people. In our own day, do we not at times need the minstrel - or that which the minstrel signifies? Are we not often faced with circumstances in which the evil is so apparent that it is easily detected, and condemned without any great call upon our spirituality? To discern, however, the mind of the Lord in the circumstances, demands far greater spirituality. For this we need to have our spirits withdrawn from the things of earth so that, undistractedly looking to the Lord, we may be able to see the condition of His people as He sees it, and thus gain His mind. The fact that it is easy to expose the evils that afflict the people of God, but difficult to find the remedy, only proves how much we need the minstrel — the abstraction of spirit from the confused issues amongst the people of God, that will alone enable us to learn the mind of the Lord. Had Elisha only taken into account the wickedness of Jehoram, the failure of Jehoshaphat, and the distressing circumstances into which they were brought by this unholy alliance, he might have argued that the kings were only reaping what they had sown, and that evidently it was the Lord's mind that they should suffer a great defeat. By the minstrel Elisha is lifted above the circumstances of God's people on earth into the calm of the Lord's presence in heaven, there to learn that the mind of the Lord is very different from what the mind of nature might expect. Elisha discovers that the Lord was going to use the occasion of His people's failure, and distress, to vindicate His own glory and magnify His grace. Not only would He preserve His people from the destruction that their own folly merited, but He would grant them a signal victory over their enemies. And thus it came to pass, the kings and their armies are saved, by God's gracious and miraculous intervention, and a great victory is gained over their enemies.

Nevertheless, it is well for us to note that, in spite of God's grace delivering His people from destruction, and giving them a victory over their enemies, there is no revival Godward. In Judah, there are indeed revivals Godward, as well as victories manward; but in all the sad history of Israel, though God may come to their help in their distress, there are no recorded revivals toward God.

7. THE WIDOW'S OIL 2 Kings 4:1-7. The God that "telleth the number of the stars," and "calleth them by their names," is the God that "healeth the broken in heart." The stars are too high, and the sorrows of a broken heart too deep, for us to reach: but the God that can count the myriad stars of heaven, can stoop to heal one broken heart on earth (Psalms 147:3-4). The grace of God that has saved kings and their armies from destruction, is able to meet the need of one desolate widow. Elisha, too, the minister of this grace, is as ready to come to the help of this lowly widow as before he had been the willing servant of kings. If he saves the great ones of the earth in their difficulties, he will also save the poor in their distress. The widow of a son of the prophets — one who feared the Lord — is threatened with the loss of her two sons to meet the claims of her creditor. That the widow of a prophet could be reduced to such straits is surely a solemn reflection on the low

condition of the nation.

However, the woman has faith to avail herself of the grace that is ministered by Elisha. She spreads out her case before the prophet. He enquires, "What shall I do for thee? Tell me, what hast thou in the house?" Thus she is not only a woman with deep need, but it becomes manifest that her own resources are utterly insufficient to meet the need. This surely is in harmony with the way of the Lord; for in His day, when the disciples tell Him of the need of the multitude, before exercising His grace, He makes manifest their utter inability to meet the case by asking, "How many loaves have ye?" The Lord's question brings to light that they had but five loaves and two small fishes. But what are they among so many? So Elisha's question brings to light that the widow has nothing in her house "save a pot of oil." But how can that save her from the claims of the creditor?

Such questions, whether on the part of the Master or the servant, prepare the way for the display of the grace of God. The Lord takes the five loaves and the two fishes and looking up to heaven blesses them. Thus having brought the disciples' little in touch with heaven's plenty, it more than meets the needs of the multitude. So with the widow's pot of oil: when brought into touch with the power of God in grace, it will more than meet her need.

Nevertheless, Elisha uses the pot of oil, even as the Lord uses the loaves and the fishes. In both cases they are provisions of God, and as such are not ignored. Another has said, "God does not allow us to be placed in circumstances which bear no evidence of His providing mercies. They may be very small and scanty, yet faith appropriates them, and encouraging the soul in God proclaims, 'The Lord is my helper,' not outside His mercies, but through them." God had provided the widow with the personal means to meet her need, though she had to be directed how to use the means in dependence upon God. The neighbours can only provide the occasion to use the means at her disposal. Again it has been said, "The testimony in asking the loan of an empty vessel was that she, who was known to be in such abject circumstances, had something to put into them. She might doubtless have been taunted that her poverty was notorious, and that it was folly to borrow empty vessels. She had only boldly to say, 'The Lord is my helper.'" In using the means she must, however, shut the door upon all outside influences, and thus express her dependence upon God. Thus, while the grace of God comes in to meet her need, God does not ignore the gift with which she was endowed, small though it may be. In using it in dependence upon God she finds that it increases, with the result that her debts are paid and means provided for her living. Such is the mercy of God and the way it takes to meet our necessities. It was thus with the multitude in the Lord's day: their need was fully met, but the mercy of God was greater than their need. When all were filled there were still twelve baskets of fragments gathered up.

Moreover, has not this mystic scene an underlying spiritual meaning for believers? Here was one who wanted a blessing from God, and yet had nothing in her house save a pot of oil. Nevertheless, in the pot of oil there was the potential means provided by God to meet all her needs, and sustain her life. However, in order that God may use the oil, He needs empty vessels. The woman's part was to provide the empty vessels, God will fill them. There was no lack in the supply of oil. The lack came on the woman's side. The oil stayed because there was not a vessel more.

Thus it is with the believer to-day who desires that all his spiritual needs may be met, and that he may enter upon the fulness of life. He has the power for this life in the gift of the Holy Spirit, of

whom oil in Scripture is the constant type. There is the exhortation, "Be filled with the Spirit." However, to be filled with the Spirit, God must have empty vessels. There is oftentimes with us the allowance of unjudged flesh. The heart is filled with so much that is not Christ. The world in different degrees, and the flesh in varied forms, is allowed, and thus there is little room for the oil. We need to shut the door upon the world, and the flesh, in order that the Spirit that we possess may fill our hearts and, thus walking according to the Spirit and minding the things of the Spirit, we may find life and peace, "for the mind of the flesh is death; but the mind of the Spirit life and peace" (Romans 8:6, N. Tr.).

"What is our work when God a blessing would impart? To bring the empty vessel of a needy heart." Nor is the application of this incident limited to the individual. The Church, widowed by Christ's absence, fails to meet her responsibilities. Yet the Holy Ghost abides, and as we recognise His presence, and are subject to His ministry, we are enabled to face all our responsibilities, and as a result of God's operation live of the rest. All the fulness of the Godhead, as set forth in Christ in glory, is available for us.

8. THE SHUNAMMITE (2 Kings 4:8-37). The beautiful story of the Shunammite was cast in a dark day in the history of Israel. The king of Israel "wrought evil in the sight of the Lord." The idols set up by Jeroboam were still worshipped by the people. The morally decadent nation was moving on to judgment. In spite of the low state of the professing people of God, we are permitted to see that God was working in sovereign grace, through His servant Elisha, bringing to light a remnant that God had reserved to Himself, of whom the Shunammite is a shining example. Her story cannot fail to encourage believers who find themselves living in a yet darker day. On every hand the corrupt systems of Christendom are seeking to unite in a great worldly union in which every vital truth of Christianity will be lost, only to end in uniting into a lifeless mass to be spued out of Christ's mouth. Yet how good to know that in such a day God is working in sovereign grace, and still has His elect; little known by the world, but well known and recognised by God. As it was in the days of Elisha, and in the days of Malachi, so it has been in every dark day, and still is in these the darkest of all days — the closing days of Christendom. In such days God observes, and listens to those who fear His name, and speak often one to another; and He keeps a book of remembrance for those that fear the Lord, and think upon His name. Thus it is that God has kept in remembrance for His praise, and our encouragement, the beautiful traits in the character of the Shunammite, that witness to the reality of her faith, and mark her off as one of God's elect.

She comes before us as a great woman of Shunem — a woman of wealth and position. None the less she was not ashamed to constrain a humble ploughman to enter her house to eat bread. She was not forgetful to entertain strangers. Her faith in God was proved by her hospitality to the servant of God, and she had her reward.

Moreover, there was with her spiritual discernment. She can say to her husband, of Elisha, "I perceive that this is an holy man of God." Blessed, indeed, that there should have been in Elisha the display of a character which marked him, in the eyes of others, as "an holy man of God;" blessed, too, that in the great woman of Shunem there was an appreciation of such a character. We may well covet both things — the Christian life so lived that all men can discern that we are disciples of Christ; and the deep appreciation of such a life when set forth in others. Does this not again bespeak the faith of God's elect? As we should say, "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the

Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth Him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of Him" (1 John 5:1).

Furthermore, her faith leads to practical service. It was no part of her work as a woman to go forth in public service, but she did what she could. She uses her means to make provision in private, for one that God was using in public. Moreover, she does so in a way that proves she had right spiritual instincts. She knew what was suited to one who witnessed against the wickedness of men, and testified to the grace of God. Therefore it is that she does not make provision for the prophet according to the resources of her wealth, and the rich appointments that would be natural to a great woman. She only provides that which would be suited to the simple tastes and needs of "an holy man of God." "A little chamber" with simple furnishings — a bed, a table, a stool, and a candlestick — she felt would be in accord with the mind of one who was apart from the world and its ways, and who had been in touch with heavenly scenes.

Thus it is she meets the need of the prophet; but she does so without ostentation. She entertains according to the needs and tastes of her guest, and with no thought of exalting herself in the eyes of her guest by making a parade of her wealth. In the "little chamber" there was no provision to meet the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life; but there was all necessary provision to meet the need of a heavenly stranger. And this perception of his tastes, and provision for his needs, is duly appreciated by the prophet, who gladly avails himself of her kindness. Furthermore, Elisha will show that he is not unmindful of her goodness, and would fain make some recompense. He has just been the instrument of saving kings, captains, and their armies from an overwhelming catastrophe, and doubtless, at the moment, could have obtained favours from high quarters. Would then this great woman like Elisha to speak to the king, or captain of the host, on her behalf? Her answer is very beautiful, and gives further proof that she is imbued with the spirit of God’s elect. She says, "I dwell among mine own people." She is satisfied to be outside the high circles of a corrupt world, and has no desire for its distinctions and favours. She would fain pursue her retired way with her own people, content to be unknown by the great ones of the earth. Happy for us, if belonging to that privileged heavenly company, that the Lord recognises as "His own" we take a place outside this world, not fearing its frowns, nor courting its favours, and whole-heartedly identify ourselves with that company as our "own company" (John 13:1; Acts 4:23).

Elisha, however, has other resources to draw upon than the kings and captains of this world. He is in touch with higher powers and heavenly courts. He can draw upon the mighty power of God "who quickeneth the dead." Blessing from this heavenly source the woman will not refuse, though, at the moment, what Elisha proposes, seems almost beyond her faith. However, in due time, she learns like the wife of Abraham, in a day that was past, and the wife of Zacharias, in a day yet to come, that God can quicken the dead, and that what He has promised He is able to perform. So it comes to pass; in due season, she embraces a son.

There is, however, another and a deeper lesson she has to learn. Through experience, trying indeed to the flesh, she will discover that the life-giving God is also the God of resurrection. Had not Abraham to learn this lesson on Mount Moriah? And have we not also to learn that God is not only the Quickener who gives life, He is also the God of resurrection that can give back life when death has shown its power? To learn this lesson, Abraham, in his day, had to bind Isaac to the altar on Mount Moriah, and the woman must face the death of her beloved child. So it came to

pass when the child was grown, there came a day when he was stricken down in the field and was carried to the mother to die in her arms. This sore trial very blessedly brings out the faith of the Shunammite. In perfect calmness she lays the dead child on the bed of the man of God, and shutting the door upon him went out. She utters no word of what has happened to her husband, but simply calls upon him to supply her with a young man, and one of the asses, to go to the man of God. The one who was the instrument to give life is the one to whom she turns in the presence of death. Her husband, ignorant of what has happened, asks, "Wherefore wilt thou go to him to-day? It is neither new moon, nor sabbath." If he thinks of the man of God, it is only in connection with new moons and sabbaths. Like many another, in this day, his only thought of God is connected with a religious festival, or the outward observance of a day. The links that faith has with God are matters of life and death. Faith, however, may not be able to argue with unbelief, or meet the questions raised by mere reason; but faith can say in the darkest moment, "It is well" (N. Tr.). Thus the faith of the Shunammite, rising above the sorrow that filled her mother's heart, knowing that the dead child is lying in the prophet's chamber, and in the face of all the questions of unbelief, can say, "It is well."

Having obtained the servant and the ass, she hastens to the man of God. Elisha, seeing her coming, sends Gehazi to meet her. To all his enquiries she has but one answer, "It is well;" but she will not unburden her heart to the servant. Pressing on to the man of God she flings herself at his feet uttering a few broken sentences that reveal to Elisha the cause of her trouble.

Immediately Elisha sends Gehazi with his staff to lay upon the face of the child. However, this does not satisfy the woman: her faith clings to the man of God. Her faith refused to be hindered by her husband, with his talk of new moons and sabbaths, from going to the man of God; and now that she has come she will not leave the man of God by reason of Gehazi and the staff. Thus it is she says, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." She rightly feels that servants and staves will be of no avail. Nothing but the power of God brought in by one who is in touch with God will restore the dead child. Her spiritual instincts are right. The prophet goes with her, and on the way the servant meets them with the news that the staff has accomplished nothing. — "The child is not awakened." Arrived at the house, the prophet finds that "the child is dead, and laid upon the bed." He went into the chamber of death and "shut the door upon them twain and prayed unto the Lord." It was a solemn moment in which the prophet felt his utter dependence upon the Lord; and more, he felt the deep necessity of being alone with the Lord. The husband, with his talk of new moons and sabbaths; the servant, with his staff, and the woman with her sorrow, must all be shut out. Religious observances will not bring the child back; the staff, that may meet every day circumstances, will be of no avail in this sore strait; grief, however real will not recall the child. It must be the Lord alone who can raise the dead. Thus it is that Elisha, "shut the door . . . and prayed unto the Lord."

Furthermore) the prophet identifies himself with the one for whom he prays. He "lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and he stretched himself upon the child." Do we not see in this fine scene, the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man? Prayer which rightly excluded everything of man and his efforts prayer that looks only to the Lord, and wholly identifies itself with the need of the one for whom prayer is made. Such faith has its reward — the prayer is answered, for we read, "the flesh of the child waxed warm." Yet, even so, it was not without the wrestling of faith, and the agony of prayer, for

we read that the prophet "returned, and walked in the house to and fro; and went up and stretched himself upon him." Then the child opened his eyes. The prophet having sent for the Shunammite says, with becoming calmness, "Take up thy child." The woman on her part, expresses no amazement, but, in thankfulness "fell" at the prophet's feet, "bowed herself to the ground, and took up her son and went out."

God is not unmindful of this simple, unquestioning faith that clings to God, even when death has closed all earthly hopes, and put the child beyond all human aid. Thus it comes to pass, that amongst God's worthies, who have obtained a good report by faith, we read, "Women receiveth their dead raised to life again" (Hebrews 11:35). In answer to the faith of the woman, and the prayers of Elisha, God reveals Himself as, not only One who gives life where life had never been before; but also as the God who quickens and calls back to life one who has been into death. So, too, it is our high privilege to know God, revealed in Christ according to the Lord's own words, "I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE."

9. THE TIME OF DEARTH 2 Kings 4:38-41

Each changing scene in Elisha's eventful history increasingly discloses the ruin of Israel, only to make manifest that where sin abounds grace does much more abound. Already we have seen the curse at Jericho, scoffers at Bethel, Moab in rebellion, widows in need; and now we find "there was a dearth in the land." In this time of famine Elisha comes to Gilgal. The sons of the prophets are found sitting before Elisha; suggesting that in their dire need they are waiting upon the man of God to bring relief. They rightly assume that the one who had saved armies from destruction, and raised the dead child of the Shunammite, had resources to meet their need in a time of famine. With the sons of the prophets there was faith to use the grace of God ministered through the prophet. God delights to answer faith, however feeble, and will never fail those who wait upon Him: though He may take a way which, while meeting our needs, will disclose to us our weakness.

Thus it comes to pass that Elisha instructs his servant to "set on the great pot and seethe pottage" for those who were looking to him for provision. It would seem that, in this time of dearth, they had been naturally husbanding their slender resources by using some smaller vessel. Nature would argue that the prevailing dearth would only require a little pot. Providence would suggest that a wise economy demanded the little pot. With God, however, there is no lack of supply; and faith, bringing God in, calls for "the great pot: heaven's plenty is only met by "the great pot." We can count upon great things from a great God. The directions to seethe pottage were given by the prophet to his servant. However, there was one present to whom no directions were given, and who must needs intermeddle with the servant's work: one who was not content, as were the sons of the prophets, to sit before Elisha, but with restless activity must go "out into the field" at his own charges, and seek to help in meeting the common need by adding his contribution to the pot.

If we are to partake of heaven's provision we must needs be in quiet rest in the presence of Christ, like the sons of the prophets sitting before Elisha. So in later days the place of rich provision was found by Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus, rather than by Martha with her restless activity. Doubtless the man who "went into the field to gather herbs," was a very sincere man and thought, as Martha in her day, that he was contributing to the general good. It was, however, the intrusion of the flesh in Gilgal, the very place that signified the cutting off of the flesh. The result was that through the fleshly zeal of one man, death is brought into the pot. This man, leaving the presence

of Elisha, goes out into the field to gather herbs. He thought to add something from the field to the supply that Elisha was drawing from heaven. The field in Scripture is ever used as a picture of the cultured world. The culture of this world can add nothing to the food from heaven. The Colossians, in their day, were in danger of seeking to supplement Christianity by the addition of human eloquence, human philosophy and human superstition. They were adding wild gourds to the heavenly pottage. Instead of bringing the soul into closer relationships with God, such efforts end in separating the soul from God.

Moreover, there is no difficulty in securing wild gourds. It was a time of dearth, and yet with the greatest ease this man gathered "his lap full." There may have been a dearth of wholesome life-sustaining food, there was no dearth of wild gourds. The mischief is at once detected when the pottage is poured out. All the company detect the poison. Had it been one man who complained of the pottage, it might have been suggested that his taste was at fault. But we read, "As they were eating of the pottage, that they cried out, and said, O man of God, there is death in the pot. And they could not eat thereof." That which should have been a source of supply to maintain life, had become, by one man’s act, a means to destroy life. They may not know how to meet the difficulty; but at least they are alive to the trouble, and, moreover, they rightly turn to the man of God for guidance. Their appeal to Elisha is not in vain, for he has resources to meet this fresh need. He has an antidote for the poison. His simple instructions are, "bring meal," which at once is cast into the pot with the result there was no longer any harm in the pot. Does not this meal speak of Christ? The thoughts of nature, the philosophy of man, the elements of the world, the religion of the flesh — things by which man seeks to add something to God’s provision to meet His people’s need — are all exposed and corrected by the presentation of Christ. It was thus the Apostle met the attempt to introduce wild gourds that threatened the Colossian saints. The Apostle detects the poison — the enticing words of the moralist, the philosophy and vain deceit of the world, the insistence of the holy days, of the new moons, and of sabbath days, by the ritualist; and the worshipping of angels by the superstitious. To meet these poisonous influences that are destructive of the true life of Christianity he presents Christ. He says all these things "are not after Christ." They may be served up with "enticing words" and much shew of wisdom "and apparent" humility, but they "are not after Christ." Then he presents Christ in all His glory as the Head of the Assembly — His body. As it were, he casts the meal into the pot. He tells us that we have all we need in Christ, for "in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead," and further, "we are complete in Him." "Christ is all and in all" (Colossians 2:1-23, Colossians 3:1-25).

10. THE MULTITUDE FED 2 Kings 4:42-44. In this time of dearth, a man comes from Baal-shalisha with twenty loaves of barley, and full ears of corn in a sack, as a gift of firstfruits to the man of God. Immediately Elisha says, "Give unto the people, that they may eat." Freely he had received and freely he gives. He does not keep for his own use that which had been freely given to him. In giving the gift increases, so that, not only his own need is met, but the needs of one hundred men are met, and more than met. The servant of the prophet cannot understand how twenty loaves can meet the need of one hundred men; but again Elisha’s word is, "Give the people that they may eat." He says, as it were, if you will but give in accordance with the word of the Lord, you will find there will be enough to meet the need of the people and to spare. Nature raises questions and says, How can this be? It is told not to reason but only obey and all will be well.

So, in the day of the Lord, the natural reasoning of the human mind in Judas, can ask, "How is it?" in the presence of communications that transcend all human thought. Such reasoning is met, not with any explanation that would gratify human reason, but with the Lord's words that "If a man love Me he will keep My words"; and this would lead to the realization of things that are beyond human explanation. Judas would fain reason in order to understand, but is told to obey in order to realize. In like manner Elisha meets the "how" of the amazed and reasoning servant. He must act upon the word of the Lord, and he will realize the blessing of the Lord, even if he cannot explain the power and grace of the Lord. So it came to pass; "he set it before them, and they did eat, and left thereof, according to the word of the Lord." The prophet gives of that which had been freely given to him, the servant obeys, the need is met, and the gift has so increased that after every need is met there is "left thereof, according to the word of the Lord." For we must share, if we would keep, That good thing from above;

Ceasing to give, we cease to have —

Such is the law of Love.

11 THE HEALING OF THE LEPER 2 Kings 5:1-19.

Hitherto Elisha has been the minister of the grace of God in the midst of Israel; now he becomes a means of blessing to one outside the nation. Grace is extended to a Gentile. The whole scene would seem to be a foreshadowing of the present dispensation, in which Israel is set aside and governmental power is given to the Gentiles. The times of the Gentiles are prefigured by the fact the Lord had given deliverance to the Syrians — the open enemy of Israel, and that captives had been taken from Israel. The power had passed to the Gentile, and an Israelitess is in captivity. During this time the Lord shows grace to the Gentile. In Naaman we see man at his best estate. Socially he was "a great man "; officially he was a successful man; personally he was a brave man. Such was Naaman before the world. Nevertheless, the one who is the favourite of the king, and the hero of the people, is pronounced by God to be a leper. In a twofold way leprosy is a fitting type of sin. The loathsomeness of the disease sets forth the defiling character of sin, constituting man a sinner in nature. The incurable character of the disease, sets forth the hopeless condition to which sin reduces a man. As fallen men we are not only sinful in nature, but also without strength to change our state. If we are to be blessed, we are shut up to the grace of God. Thus the word runs, "By grace are ye saved, through faith . . . not of works" (Ephesians 2:8).

Thus his disease, coupled with his helpless condition, constituted Naaman a fitting object for God's sovereign grace and mercy. That which gave Naaman such a great place before the world had no value in God's sight. The Lord, who, in His day (Luke 4:27), uses Naaman as an illustration of grace reaching a Gentile, does not say there were many great men, and honourable men, and men of valour. None of these qualities would have made men suited objects for grace: therefore He says, there were many lepers.

Further, in this fine scene, we see not only the activity of grace to a sinner, but the way God takes to make known this grace. He takes a way that pours contempt on all our pride. He has "chosen the foolish things of the world, that He may put to shame the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world, that He may put to shame the strong things; and the ignoble things of the world, and the despised has God chosen, and things that are not that He may annul the things that

are; so that no flesh should boast before God." In consistency with these ways of God we pass at once from "a great man" to "a little maid" — a stranger in a strange land, and in the lowly position of a slave to Naaman's wife. God is going to bless one who, in the sight of the world, is "a great man," and hence He will use in this work of grace "a little maid." However, if her position in this world was insignificant, if she was "little," her faith was great. For she can say, "Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy." This surely is the language of faith. There is no suggestion that he might be able to ameliorate the trouble, and possibly effect a cure; but with the boldness and certainty of faith she says, "He would recover him of his leprosy." She speaks as one who knows the healing power of grace. Naaman, as it has been said, may feel the sore; the little maid knew the healing. Her confidence is the more remarkable since she could not, in her experience, have seen any case of the healing of the leper; for the Lord, Himself, says, that in the time of Elisha, there were many lepers but "none of them was cleansed" saving Naaman the Syrian. The word of the little maid does its work. It awakens the desire for the blessing in the heart of the needy Naaman. However, the ways of grace cannot be understood by the natural man. Filled with his own thoughts, he pays but little heed to the word of the little maid. She with her knowledge of the grace and power of God speaks of the prophet in Samaria; he, following his natural thoughts, turns to the king of Syria, thinking that the coveted blessing can be secured through the great ones of the earth, aided by the payment of a great fee. The king of Syria sets forth man in his self esteem. He is only too pleased that his servant Naaman should have the blessing, but he would fain be the channel by which he obtains the blessing. So he says, "Go to, go, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel." One king will write to another king. But God does not require, and will not brook the patronage of kings. Grace is available for the guilty, whether that guilty one be amongst the exalted in the land or among the lowly — "a great man" or "a little maid" — but the patronage of kings cannot secure it, and gold cannot buy it.

However, Naaman has to prove that all these human efforts to secure the blessing leave him in a worse plight. So he comes to the king of Israel with his gifts and the letter from the king of Syria. The king of Israel realizes that this is a case for God alone, but he is ignorant of the man of God through whom the grace of God is being ministered. Without faith in God, and ignorant of the man of God, he can only conclude that the king of Syria is seeking an occasion for a quarrel by demanding that which is beyond the power of man to grant. Naaman discovers the hopelessness of turning to a man of the world, but, even so, it does not occur to Naaman to go to the prophet. It would seem then that all is over, and Naaman must return to Syria uncleansed and unblessed. At this juncture, however, Elisha acts, and it becomes plain that if Elisha had not spoken, Naaman would never have come to the prophet, even though at the outset he had heard of the prophet. Nor is it otherwise with the sinner and Christ. We may indeed hear of Christ, but it is written, "No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him" (John 6:44): and again, "No man can come unto Me, except it were given unto him of my Father" (John 6:65). As a result of Elisha's intervention, Naaman, earnestly desiring the blessing, comes to the prophet. At last he has come to the right man; but he has come in the wrong way. He is not yet in the right condition to receive the blessing. He comes with his horses and chariots and stands at the door of the house of Elisha. Horses and chariots speak of the pomp and pride of man. Naaman has found that the might of kings can effect nothing, that money and gifts are of no avail; he must now learn that his own greatness and importance will not secure him the slightest notice on the part of God, with whom there is no respect of persons. Hence while he hears the message that, if received and

obeyed, will bring salvation to him, yet no account is made of the greatness of Naaman. Elisha does not look at him as a great man, or honourable, or valiant; he simply sees in him a leper that needs cleansing. Elisha makes nothing of all the pomp and grandeur of Naaman; nor does he seek to exalt himself by this important visitor. He simply sends a message. This, indeed, is still the preacher’s work, to deliver a message.

Nature, however, rebels against such treatment. The pride of man would like to have some consideration. But if Naaman is to receive the blessing it can be only on the ground of grace, and grace recognises no merit in the recipient of grace, otherwise it would not be grace. Hence it is that sovereign grace is so offensive to the natural man. "Naaman was wroth," and the real hindrance to his receiving blessing is discovered to be that he had thoughts of his own. "I thought" is the trouble. He thought he would only have to sit in his chariot and that Elisha would come and stand before Naaman, and add dignity to the scene by calling upon the name of the Lord his God, with a few passes of his hand up and down, and lo, he would be healed.

Further, Naaman objects to washing in Jordan. If it is a question of washing in a river, surely the larger rivers of his own country — Abana and Pharpar — are better than all the waters of Israel. Thus it is with many a sinner to-day, who admits the need of a moral change in the life, but not of a new birth. Men will submit to reformation effected by human means, but are not prepared to be set aside in the death of Christ. Naaman had expected some dramatic scene — to have some fuss made over him — and lo, this prince among men, is put off with a curt message. He is told, as any poor man might be, to go and bathe seven times in the public stream of Jordan. The whole thing appeared too commonplace for the high and mighty Naaman. The message ignored all his greatness; placed him on a level with the most insignificant person in the land, and told him to take a course that was open to any peasant. Elisha could not have treated the lowest in the land with less consideration. Such treatment) and such a message, were intolerable to the great man. "So he turned and went away in a rage."

Well, if he must go away, it is better to go in a rage, for at least it shows he was deeply stirred. Better thus than those who politely refuse God’s grace with a "Pray Thee have me excused." For such there is no hope; God excuses them, and it is all over with the man that God excuses. For the man that goes away in a rage there is hope that he will return in more chastened mood, for at least he is in earnest.

Naaman had expected some great display, and nature craves for the dramatic, the sensational and the emotional; but Naaman must learn, as every sinner, that the mighty power of the gospel is not in "the earthquake, nor in the fire, but in the still small voice" of the word of God speaking to the conscience.

Happily for Naaman there were those around him who could plead with him and convince him of his folly. The little maid had borne her witness, the prophet had delivered his message — so simple and definite; now "his servants come near" and plead with him about the message. There are those to-day who do the work of the little maid — they invite to the preaching. There are those who deliver the message — the proclamation of the gospel. There are those who plead with the anxious soul individually, so that difficulties and hindrances to receiving the gospel may be removed. Thus with affectionate interest the servants plead with their master. "My father," they say, "if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much

rather then, when he saith to thee wash and be clean?" How well these servants knew their master; he was a great man, and all his life had been doing great things. He had acquired a great position in the kingdoms of men by doing great things; but if, as we should say, he is to enter the kingdom of heaven, he must be converted and become as a little child. And thus it came to pass: the pleadings of the servants prevail, for we read, "Then went he down." His pride, his greatness, his valour, all that he was as a natural man is given up as a means of obtaining the blessing. Kings and their great gifts are left behind: Abana and Pharpar are forgotten, and, in the obedience of faith, he went down and dipped seven times in Jordan "according to the saying of the man of God." Such an act m the eyes of the world would seem the height of folly, even as the preaching of the Cross is foolishness to the wise men of this world. Jordan signifies death, and is used, in this scene, as a type of the death of Christ meeting the holiness of God. If the sinner is to be cleansed from his guilt it can only be on the ground of the death of Christ. In type Naaman owns this perfectly, without reserve, by dipping seven times in Jordan. He owns there is no cleansing except through the waters of death under which he is brought by the obedience of faith.

Thus it is with the sinner to-day. The blessing can only come to us in grace through the death and resurrection of Christ, and we pass under the efficacy of that death through faith in Christ. The Israelite, like Naaman, was originally "a Syrian ready to perish" (Deuteronomy 26:5), and for him Jordan meant the close of one phase of life (wilderness life), and the introduction to another sphere of life. The Jordan was the boundary of Syrian territory. Death ends the link with the Syrian. By dipping in Jordan Naaman in type ends the old life, and begins an entirely new life; his flesh becomes as the flesh of a little child. His former state as a leper, in which corruption and death were operating, was wholly unsuited to God; debarring him from God’s presence. This was met by the waters of death. An evil nature cannot be forgiven, it must be ended by death. So with the believer, the old nature is condemned and done with in the death of Christ. The soul that, in the obedience of faith, submits to God’s way of deliverance enters upon a new life. The prophet emphasises the importance of this lesson by prescribing it seven times, setting forth how thoroughly we need to learn the lesson of our death with Christ, so bringing to an end the state in which we lived to ourselves in order that, in newness of life we may live to God. The result for Naaman was that his flesh came again like unto the flesh of "a little child." What a marvellous change! The man who at the beginning of the story is described as "a great man," in the end becomes like "a little child." Moreover, a new spirit possessed him. The pride of a great man has given place to the lowliness of a little child; for, we read, "He returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and stood before him." He is no longer a great man sitting in his chariot, but a humble man standing before the prophet.

This, however, is not all. He has believed in his heart; now he confesses with his mouth, "There is no God in all the earth, but in Israel." Not only is he cleansed, but he is brought to know God." "I know" he can say. The gospel that meets our need, reveals God to our souls.

Then he would fain express his gratitude to the one through whom he has been so richly blessed. Elisha refuses the gift lest in any way he might appear to falsify the grace of God in the eyes of this Gentile, who had received the blessing without money and without price. Naaman, the possessor of great wealth, had doubtless acquired the habit of thinking that anything could be purchased with the power of money. He has to learn, even as the sinner to-day, that there are blessings beyond all other blessings, and joys beyond all earthly joys, and the life that is eternal, that all the riches of

this world cannot purchase; though alas! they may block the way that leads to life and blessing.

Furthermore, the heart of Naaman goes out in worship to the Lord. He says, "Thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord."

Lastly the change in his life is shown by his exercised and tender conscience. He at once felt that the worship of the Lord was wholly inconsistent with bowing down before an idol in the house of Rimmon. Yet his official position would possibly require that he should enter the idol's house. In answer to this difficulty Elisha's word is "Go in peace." This by no means implied that Elisha sanctioned Naaman's bowing down to the idol in the house of Rimmon. He saw that Naaman was exercised before the Lord, and without anticipating the difficulty, he knows he can safely leave Naaman with the Lord. We may be sure that Naaman never entered the house of Rimmon.

12. THE SERVANT OF THE PROPHET 2 Kings 5:20-27.

Now and again there pass before us in Scripture those who lie and deceive: but there is no more deliberate liar than Gehazi. As with Ananias and Sapphira, so with Gehazi, covetousness was the root of the lying. The wealth of Naaman — the ten talents of silver, the six thousand pieces of gold, the ten changes of raiment — had stirred up the unjudged covetousness in the heart of Gehazi. The need of Naaman drew forth the grace of God in the prophet; the wealth of Naaman drew forth the covetousness of his servant. The grace of God had brought blessing to Naaman; the covetousness of Gehazi would belie the grace of God. A rich man willing and delighted to bestow a handsome gift, was too good an opportunity for a covetous man to let pass. To gratify his greed, Gehazi does not hesitate to act lies as well as tell lies. He runs after Naaman and says, "My master hath sent me." This was the first lie. Then he invents the story of the visit of the two young men of Ephraim — a second lie. Having obtained two talents of silver, and two changes of raiment, he returns with two of Naaman's servants to help him carry the gift as far as the hill (not "tower" as in the Authorised Version). To go further would be to come into view of Elisha's house; so he pauses at the hill, and lets the men go. Having hidden the goods in the house, "He went in, and stood before his master" as if nothing had happened. He acts a lie. When asked by Elisha, where he had been, he attempts to cover his former lies by telling another lie, "Thy servant went no whither." One lie leads to other lies.

Then follows the solemn exposure. The whole terrible sin, in all its detail, was known to the prophet: but more, the motive that prompted the sin was known. Hidden in Gehazi's heart was the desire to acquire social position as a possessor of oliveyards, vineyards, sheep, oxen, menservants and maidservants.

Lastly the exposure is followed by the judgment. If Gehazi had taken of Naaman's wealth, he must also take Naaman's disease. He had acquired two changes of raiment from Naaman by lying and deceit; he also obtains a change of skin by the judgment of God. And the leprosy that he acquires will cling to him all the days of his life. The wealth he has obtained will soon be spent, the leprosy will abide. No waters of Jordan will cleanse Gehazi.

He came in before his master as a liar; he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow. In grasping at the wealth of Naaman, he inherits the disease of Naaman, and loses his place as the servant of the prophet. Once more he appears in the court of the king, but no more as the servant of Elisha. In estimating the sin of Gehazi, the prophet first looks at it in connection with God and

His grace. How will his act affect the testimony of God? He sees that Gehazi's sin presents an entirely false view of the grace of God. Elisha had been careful to refuse Naaman's gifts, lest this Gentile should think that the blessings of God can be obtained by gifts. Gehazi's sin would tend to nullify this testimony to the freeness of the grace of God. It was no "time" to receive gifts. Are we not warned by this solemn scene that if we allow unjudged lust or covetousness in our hearts, we shall be ready to fall into temptation when it crosses our path. Further, one sin leads to another. We cannot stop just according to our own will in the path of sin. As one has said, "A man cannot stop his boat at will in the strong currents just above Niagara, though he might have avoided them altogether."

Then it is obvious that great religious advantages will not, of themselves, protect against grievous sin. Who could have had greater advantages than Gehazi? He lived with one of the greatest prophets the world has known — one who, again and again, is described as a man of God — and yet Gehazi fell. "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."

Finally we learn that the pursuit of sin destroys all sense of the presence and power of God. Gehazi must have had repeated experiences of the power of the man of God to read men's hearts and discern the motives of their actions. No one knew better than Gehazi this power of God that was with the prophet. Nevertheless, while Gehazi is seeking to gratify his covetous heart, it is so absorbed with the overruling passion of greed that, for the time, he entirely loses all sense of the presence of the omniscient God.

Thus, with the judgment of God upon him Gehazi goes out from the presence of the prophet, as in the day to come a yet greater sinner will go out from the presence of the Lord into the night and Ananias and Sapphira will fall dead under the judgment of the Holy Spirit.

13. THE BORROWED AXE 2 Kings 6:1-7.

Once again the story of Elisha passes from kings and great men, to a simple domestic scene connected with the building of a dwelling place for the sons of the prophets. The incident very happily displays the simplicity and lowliness of life that marked this man of God. He is ready to meet the difficulties of kings and their armies, and, in due season, can concern himself with felling a tree and building a house. With the utmost ease he can deal with a great man of the world, and with like ease he can accommodate himself to the simple affairs of the lowly sons of the prophets. In the greatness of his way he can stoop to small affairs and walk with humble folk. In like spirit the great Apostle, of the Christian day, can carry the burdens of the Church and work at making a tent; can save hundreds of souls from a watery grave, and help to pick up sticks to make a fire. And may we not say, that both these great servants are but showing forth the spirit of their yet greater Lord and Master, who, while bearing up the whole universe, can take a little child into His arms, and, though dwelling in the bosom of the Father, can enter the humble home of a fisherman.

Moreover, in the simple acts of these servants it is made manifest what power was at their disposal. Contrary to all human experience, the venomous beast that attacks the Apostle when picking up sticks, is shaken into the fire without resulting harm. And contrary to all natural laws the axe head is made to swim upon the waters. Thus the very laws of nature are reversed, or held in abeyance, in order to relieve the distress of the man with the borrowed axe. God, the Creator of the laws that govern creation, can alter His laws in order to manifest the grace that enables Peter

to walk upon the water in the day of the Lord, and the iron to swim upon the water in the day of the prophet. The very way in which the iron is made to swim makes manifest the power of God; for what relation can we see between cause and effect — between casting a stick into the stream and the swimming of the iron? May there not be underneath this simple story some deeper spiritual lesson? We see the power of the river overcome by the piece of wood cast into the waters. Seeing that Jordan is a type of death this striking incident may well signify the power of death overcome by the Cross, and the House of God built by that which comes out of death.

14. THE SYRIAN RAIDS 2 Kings 6:8-23.

Elisha, having used the grace of God to relieve a distressed individual, now becomes the instrument of grace to save a guilty nation. The prophet, who had rebuked the king of Israel for his unbelief in connection with the letter from the king of Syria, now warns the king of the secret plans by which the king of Syria seeks his destruction. Thus the grace of God intervenes to save the king of Israel, "not once nor twice," by the hand of one who knows how to rebuke and when to warn. The king of Syria, learning that his plans are frustrated, not by any traitor, but, by Elisha, sends horses, chariots and a great host, to take him captive. The fact that he sends a great host to take one man, proves in a striking way that the ungodly realize their weakness, and helplessness, in the presence of one man sustained by the power of God. So the wicked Ahab felt in an earlier day, when he sent his captains with their fifties to take the solitary Elijah; as even so in a later day, when the Jews sent a band of officers and men to take the Lord of glory. The world instinctively knows that one man, if God is with him, is stronger than a great host without God. To natural sight Elisha’s case seemed hopeless. The Syrians had taken every precaution. The great host had exercised all care by approaching Dothan under cover of darkness, and had succeeded in compassing about the city. There seemed no way of escape for the prophet. Thus the servant of Elisha, looking at things seen, exclaims, "Alas my master! how shall we do?"

Elisha quietens the young man’s alarm. He says, "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." The young man is walking by sight: Elisha is walking by faith. The prophet anticipates the experience of the Apostle who can say, "If God be for us who can be against us?"

Elisha, however, is not content to rest in quiet faith himself, nor seek only to comfort others. He would fain bring the young men to his own spiritual elevation. Realizing that only God can accomplish this, he prays to the Lord to open his servant’s eyes. His prayer is answered; "The Lord opened the eyes of the young man." There was no need for Elisha to have his eyes opened. He had already seen the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof waiting upon Elijah as he ascended from earth to heaven. The faith of the prophet realizes that the same chariots and horses of God accompany him as he takes his journey through the earth. The young man has seen the horses and chariots, with the great host, that encompassed the city, now he sees the mountain "full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." The Syrian host may be round about the city, but what can they do if God’s high host is round about Elisha? Paul may be surrounded with enemies who would kill him, and a raging storm that would engulf him, but what harm can touch him if the angel of the Lord stands by him? (Acts 27:23). The host against Elisha may be mighty, but the host of God is mightier. "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels." Good too for us if we take our journey, through a hostile world, in the blessed consciousness of faith that One is with us who has said, "I will never leave thee, nor

forsake thee:" and that we are in the providential care of those angel hosts who have been "sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation."

Further, we are permitted to see that Elisha deals with the enemies of God according to the ways of grace, while, at the same time, manifesting that they are completely in his power. Thus it comes to pass that while the young man had his eyes opened, the enemies of God’s prophet will now have their eyes blinded. It was so spiritually when the Lord was here, for He came "that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind" (John 9:39). To own one’s blindness and submit to God is the way to sight, as the blind man of John’s Gospel found.

These blinded Syrians come completely under the power of Elisha, who leads them into Samaria. Then, when their eyes are opened, they discover they are captives — led captive by the very man they had set out to take. But if Elisha is in touch with the power of God, he is also the exponent of the mercy of God. The Syrians realize that as far as they are concerned their case is hopeless. They who once had encompassed the little city of Dothan are now themselves surrounded in the stronghold of their enemy. When it is thus made manifest that nothing but mercy can save them from destruction, they become the recipients of mercy. Not only are hey saved but "great provision" is set before them; and when they had eaten they are sent away to their master. They are brought to realize that, "It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed" (Lamentations 3:22). Such are the blessed ways of God’s grace. The man who has for his protection a mountain full of horses and chariots of fire — who is encompassed about with the mighty power of God — can afford to show mercy to those who are completely in his power. The man of nature, with no such resources of power, cannot risk showing mercy. Finding the enemy in his power the king would have smitten them. Elisha, using the power of God, dare not neglect the mercy of God; and this mercy is as great as the power. If the power of God secures a complete victory over "a great host," the mercy of God will provide for the defeated foe "great provision." Again, we say, such are the ways of grace of a great God.

15. THE SIEGE OF SAMARIA 2 Kings 6:24-27. The record of the mercy shown to the Syrian raiders closes with the statement, "So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel." Nevertheless, the hostility of the Syrians to God’s people remained. Thus we read, "It came to pass, after this, that Benhadad the king of Syria gathered all his host, and went up, and besieged Samaria" — the very city where such signal mercy had been displayed. The siege makes manifest the depths of evil to which the nation had sunk, and further displays the height to which the grace of God can rise through this, the last public service of Elisha.

Jehoram, the apostate king, was already beholden to Elisha for having saved his life, and rescued his army from destruction. Apparently this great mercy had affected no change either in the king or nation Now, in the government of God the enemy is allowed to besiege Samaria, leading to "a great famine" in the city. In the fearful straits to which the inhabitants are reduced, the solemn prophecy uttered more than five hundred years before, is fulfilled. Moses had warned the people of God, that if they departed from God, the time would come when, besieged by their enemies, they would be reduced to such straits, that tender, delicate women would secretly eat their young children (Leviticus 26:21-29; Deuteronomy 28:49-57). This abomination had at last come to pass. This terrible act instead of turning the king to God, becomes the occasion of revealing the enmity of his heart. Hearing of this horror the king rent his clothes in agony, disclosing that "he had

sackcloth within upon his flesh." Thus, combined with his evil ways, there was a profession of religion. Alas! men in their distress may, like Jehoram, turn to some religious device, but they do not turn to God. Thus, the king, in spite of the sackcloth on his flesh, vents his rage against God upon the person of the man of God. He says, "God do so and more also to me, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat shall stand on him this day." In the presence of this fresh trouble all past mercies are forgotten, and the desperate king threatens the life of the man of God. He lays the blame on the head which alone was free from the sin. Thereupon he sends a messenger to Elisha's house, where the elders were assembled in the presence of the prophet.

Elisha, apparently forewarned by God, says, "This son of a murderer hath sent to take away my head." He tells them to shut the door upon the king's messenger, for the sound of his master's feet is behind him. Arrived at the door the king dares to say, "Behold this evil is of the Lord; what should I wait for the Lord any longer?" The awful condition of the nation and the wickedness of the king are thus thoroughly exposed. The people of Samaria are struggling to obtain an ass's head, or a piece of dove's dung. Women are eating their children; the king is raging up and down on the wall; but Elisha is sitting quietly in his house waiting upon the Lord. Then comes the messenger followed by the king charging the Lord with all the evil. The king says as it were, "What is the good of Elisha sitting in his house doing nothing? He delivered me once before from destruction, why does he not act now? What is the good of his professing to wait upon the Lord? Nothing happens. I will give up all thought of the Lord, and I will take off the head of Elisha the prophet of the Lord." This son of a murderer, who himself has just sworn that he will commit murder, charges the Lord with being the author of all the evil that has come upon the guilty city. Thus the guilt of the nation, in the person of their king, has risen to its height. Does not this solemn scene foreshadow the yet greater solemnities of the Cross, where the evil of the world rose to its height in condemning the One who, alone of the whole human race, was free of all condemnation? If, however, in the siege of Samaria the sin of the nation is allowed to reveal itself in all its horror, it is that the grace of God may be displayed in all its fulness. Where sin abounds grace does much more abound, thus again foreshadowing that supreme display of grace which, rising above all man's sin at the Cross, takes occasion by that Cross, to proclaim forgiveness and blessing to all the world.

Thus it comes to pass — when the king has thoroughly exposed himself — Elisha, who hitherto had "sat in his house," keeps silence no longer God's due time had come, for we read, "Then Elisha said, Hear ye the word of the Lord." We have heard that what man says exposes the sin of his heart: we are now to hear what God says reveals the grace of His heart. So we read, "Thus saith the Lord, To-morrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria." In this message of grace there is not a word said about the abominations that had taken place in the city — not a word about the daring wickedness of the king. There is only the unconditional announcement of blessing, in pure sovereign grace, to the very city in which sin had risen to its height; for all this blessing would be seen "in the gate of Samaria." So again we are reminded of that far greater announcement of grace that sends a message of repentance and forgiveness, to be preached in the name of Christ among all nations; but that message is to begin "at Jerusalem." It is to all nations, for all are guilty, but it begins at the blackest spot in all the world. There is no word of the awful guilt of the city, no word of the daring and blasphemous enmity of the leaders, but, in sovereign unconditional grace, forgiveness is proclaimed in the Name of Jesus to the very city that nailed Him to the Cross.

"The very spear that pierced His side Drew forth the blood to save."

Thus the ruin of the nation had been made manifest, and the grace of God announced. We are now to see how man treats God’s grace. First, the nobleman, on whose arm the king leaned, treats the message with mocking unbelief, only to hear his doom. "Thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not eat thereof." Not many of the rich and great of this world are called.

Then there come before us, four leprous men — convicted sinners as we should say. They realize, what the nobleman did not, that it is either certain death, or the grace of God. The Syrian host is before them, and death surrounds them. They rise up and face death, to find that if their desperate need has driven them into the place of death, it has driven them into a place where the Lord has gained a mighty victory. They find the Lord had been before them; "The Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host." The chariots and horses that had waited upon Elijah at his translation, that had surrounded Elisha for his preservation, are now dealing with the enemies of the Lord in righteous judgment. If grace is to be shown to guilty sinners, the enemy must first be met and vanquished in righteous judgment.

If, however, the enemy is to be vanquished, it must be the work of the Lord. No one was with the Lord when He annulled the power of the enemy. The city is in desperate need, and can do nothing. The Lord does all the work; and the city, in sovereign grace, partakes of the blessing. There was no man with the Lord of glory when He went to the Cross. Alone He anticipated the terror of Calvary; alone He met the enemy; alone He suffered on the Cross; alone He endured the forsaking; alone He bore the judgment. But guilty sinners, who believe, share in the spoils of His victory. And this we see in picture, for the lepers "did eat and drink" and find silver and gold and raiment.

Further, they spread the "good tidings." They say, "If we hold our peace . . . some mischief will come upon us." The selfishness of our nature would keep quiet, thus bringing mischief upon ourselves. It may be that we have so feebly tasted of the grace of God, and so little apprehended how greatly we have been enriched with silver and gold and raiment of divine providing, that we have little to say, and hence remain silent, with the result we are in danger of slipping back into the world, and some mischief coming upon us. It is well when, like the blind man of the Gospel, we confess the little we do know, so that we not only retain what we have, but increase our light and blessing.

These four men make a bold confession. They commence with the porter of the city — a very humble man. He tells the porters of the king’s house, and they, in turn, tell the good news to the king’s house within; and at last it reaches the king’s ears. Thus the good news spread from the lowest to the highest in the land. The king is a very different character from the lepers, and represents a different state of soul. He is not indifferent, for he arose in the night. Still less is he a rejector of the good news, like the nobleman; but he is not a simple believer like the four leprous men. He does not in bold unbelief refuse the good tidings, but he reasons about them. Faith is a matter of the conscience and the heart, not a matter of reasoning. The word runs, "If thou shalt believe in thine heart." Some like the lepers readily believe in the heart, others like the king are slow of heart to believe. Behind the slowness of heart is a reasoning mind and a lack of sense of need. The reasoning mind of the king says, "I will shew you what the Syrians have done." However, as in the case of Naaman there were some wise servants who pleaded with him, so now

there is a wise servant ready to meet the king’s reasonings. He will put them to the test by sending out two witnesses. In result they trace the evidences of the enemy "unto Jordan." We can trace all our enemies to the Cross, there to see them no more. In the death of Christ every enemy was dealt with for the believer. So the messengers return, and the slow-hearted king enters into the blessing as much as the wholehearted lepers, and starving people of the city. The only man who missed the blessing is the infidel scoffer - the lord on whose arm the king leaned. In the crush at the gate of the city he was trodden upon and died. It might appear as an unfortunate accident, but the government of God was behind it, and the word of the prophet was fulfilled, "Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes? but thou shalt not eat thereof." Nor is it otherwise in our day for those who reject the grace of God. For such the word says, "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish."

16. THE SEVEN YEARS’ FAMINE 2 Kings 8:1-6. The siege of Samaria with all its horrors, and the grace of God in all its fulness, were soon forgotten. Neither misery endured, nor mercy received, turned the nation to the Lord their God. Nevertheless, God does not abandon His people. He still acts on their behalf, even though it may be in the way of chastening because of their evil. Thus we find Elisha saying, "The Lord hath called for a famine." It is not only revealed to the prophet that a famine is coming, but, that it is sent directly by the Lord, proving the truth of that word which says, "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets."

Further, it is revealed to Elisha that if God chastens His people, He also sets a limit to the trial. The famine in Israel shall come upon the land for seven years. Nor is it otherwise in the history of the Church, and of individuals, in this present day. Of the Church in Smyrna we read, "Ye shall have tribulation," but it is limited to "ten days." So, too, if there is a needs be for God’s people, individually, to pass through manifold trials, they will last but "for a season" (1 Peter 1:6).

Moreover, we learn that if the Lord calls for a famine because of the low condition of the nation He will also provide for the godly during the time of famine. Thus, once more, we see the grace of God to the Shunammite. This godly woman, who had cared for the prophet in days of prosperity, is now warned and instructed by the prophet in days of adversity. Her circumstances apparently have changed. It would seem she is now a widow with her only son. She is told to leave the land during the years of famine. At the end of the seven years she returns to the Land and appeals to the king for the restoration of her house and land. The king is talking with Gehazi, who is identified as the servant of the man of God. His circumstances also appear to have changed. Years ago he had coveted "oliveyards and vineyards, sheep, oxen, menservants and maidservants," and now, by means of his possessions, he has climbed the social ladder until he has become the associate and companion of royalty. The king would fain beguile an hour by hearing of the "great things" that Elisha had done. Gehazi is in company with the great men of the world, but if he would speak of "great things" he must needs go back in thought to other days when he companied with the lowly man of God. The "great things" that Elisha did are only a recollection with Gehazi.

It may, however, be that there was a work of grace in the heart of Gehazi leading his thoughts from the earthly riches he had gained, to the spiritual blessings he had lost. Be this as it may, he certainly becomes a witness before the king of the grace of God as seen in the "great things that Elisha had done." Moreover, the Lord uses Gehazi to restore house and lands to the Shunammite, as before He had used Elisha in warning her to leave them. But how different the way in which these men are used. Elisha is used as one who is in the intimacy of a friend with the Lord, enjoying

the confidences of the Lord. Gehazi is used as the friend and intimate of a wicked king. Elisha speaks as one who is intelligent in the mind of the Lord. Gehazi speaks as circumstances and coincidences dictate. For, as he is recounting his reminiscences in the service of Elisha, behold, the woman and her son, who had part in the greatest of the "great things," appears before the king. This apparently strange coincidence is used by the Lord to restore the Shunammite's possessions. Nor will it be otherwise with the God-fearing remnant of Israel, in a day yet to come, of whom possibly the widowed Shunammite is a figure. Like this woman who had known the grace of God, the godly remnant, on the ground of grace, will be brought back to the inheritance of their Land, and receive, in the excess of blessing, all that they have lost during the time of exile from the Land of their fathers.

It is happy thus to trace the hand of the Lord using men — whether prophets, servants, or kings — and behind every circumstance and coincidence, making all things work together for good to them that love Him.

17. THE KING OF SYRIA 2 Kings 8:7-15

Elisha's service is not confined to Israel and the Land. Thus we read he "came to Damascus," and is found amongst the Gentiles. Benhadad, the king of Syria, is sick. In his sickness he recognises and honours the man of God. In his prosperity the king had sent a great host to capture him: in his sickness he sends a great gift to honour him. In health he seeks to encompass him for his destruction: in sickness he seeks to propitiate him for his assistance. Driven by need he recognises and owns the God that hitherto he had despised. Such is man, and such our hearts. The world, when faced with some dire calamity, will, in an outward way, recognise and turn to God. Alas! even the believer may walk carelessly, with little reference to God, when all things run smoothly, and circumstances are prosperous, and health is good. But in our troubles we have to turn to God, and well it is that we do turn to God and have such a God of grace to turn to; though far better, like Enoch of old, to walk with God, and thus, like the Apostle be able to say, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need."

Elisha was evidently one who, in his day, walked with the Lord, and received communications from the Lord. Thus he can say, in answer to the messenger, "Thou mayest certainly recover." There was nothing fatal in the disease. Howbeit, the prophet adds, "The Lord hath shewed me that he shall surely die." Thus Elisha intimates that Benhadad is going to die, though by other means than the sickness. As he delivers this message the prophet is visibly affected. Foreseeing all the misery that is coming upon the people of God, he weeps. Hazael, contemplating the murder of his master, feels uneasy in the presence of the man of God. His conscience makes him ashamed. He enquires, "Why weepeth my lord? Elisha's answer clearly shows that he is not moved to tears by the illness of the king, or the wickedness of Hazael, but on account of the suffering that God's people will endure at the hands of Hazael. Elisha closes his public ministry by weeping over a people who were unmoved by all his miracles of grace. Thus he foreshadows his far greater Master who, in the closing days of His ministry of grace, wept over the city that had rejected His grace and spurned His love. One, too, who could say to the women of Jerusalem, "Weep not for Me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which

they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck." In like spirit, Elisha, knowing the future career of Hazael, foretells the depths of evil and cruelty to which he will sink. "I know," says the prophet ’’the evil thou wilt do unto the children of Israel: their strongholds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child."

Hazael protests that he is not a dog that he should act with such callous brutality. Probably his protest is entirely sincere. Such deeds might have been foreign to his thoughts, and even abhorrent to his feeling at the moment. He did not know his own heart. He was not aware that the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. As with ourselves, too often, he little realized the depth of wickedness and cruelty in the heart that is held in check by many a safeguard until, suddenly aroused by circumstances which give the occasion, it blazes forth in all its horror. Instead of asking, "Is thy servant a dog?" far better would it have been for Hazael, as for ourselves, to take the ground of the Syrophenician woman who owned that she was indeed a dog, only to discover that there is grace in the heart of God even for a dog (Mark 7:24-30). In Hazael’s history the immediate circumstances were ripe to manifest the wickedness of his heart. Thus Elisha simply answers, "The Lord hath shewed me that thou shalt be king over Syria." Without further word, Hazael "departed from Elisha, and came to his master." He acts the hypocrite before the king, giving part of Elisha’s message, but keeping back the fact that he would surely die. The opportunity has come for this murderer. As prime minister he has access to the king, and the illness offered a favourable opportunity to an unscrupulous man to usurp the throne. The idea of wielding great power, as the reigning monarch, had such irresistible attraction to Hazael that he is ready to contemplate even murder to gain his end. The sickness and weakness of the king made murder appear so easy. The sickness would be such a simple way to cover the murder. All would know that the king was ill, and fearing he might not recover had sent a prime minister to the prophet to enquire if he should die. No one need know what Elisha had said to Hazael. What more easy than to take a thick damp cloth and suffocate the helpless king, already weakened by sickness, and then give out to the world that the sickness had terminated fatally. So it came to pass; the prime minister becomes a murderer, and the murderer a usurper of the throne. The man that reaches a throne by murder will not hesitate to seek to maintain that throne by violence and cruelty. As Elisha foresees Hazael will carry the fire and the sword among the people of God.

18. THE ANOINTING OF JEHU 2 Kings 9:1-37 The mighty miracles of Elisha — the witnesses of the grace of God to a guilty nation — have all been in vain. Israel refuses to turn from idols to the living God. The prophet may weep over the sorrows coming upon the nation, may foretell their miseries, be used to appoint the instruments that will be used to execute judgment, but, though he lives to a ripe old age, we hear of miracles no more.

Thus it comes to pass that Elisha sends one of the children of the prophets to anoint Jehu to be king, by the word of the Lord. The young man is to carry out his commission in a way that will clearly show Elisha has nothing in common with Jehu; for, having delivered his message, he is to "open the door, and flee, and tarry not." The young man had two announcements to make to Jehu; first, that the Lord had anointed him to be "king over the people of the Lord, even over Israel." Second, he was to smite the house of Ahab, and thus avenge the blood of the servants, and prophets, of the Lord, shed by the wicked Jezebel. To reach the throne was entirely in accord with the ambitions of Jehu. To smite the house of Ahab would appear to Jehu a sound policy to

establish himself as king. Hence he carries out the directions of the Lord with greatest possible energy and zeal. However, God's motives were not Jehu's. God was dealing with evil, avenging the blood of his servants, and maintaining His own glory. Jehu was getting rid of all those who could oppose his ambitions. Jehu is very zealous in dealing with evil when it suits his own purpose, but quite indifferent to evil when he concludes it is politic to leave it alone. So it comes to pass he ruthlessly avenges the sins of the house of Ahab, while leaving untouched the sins of the house of Jeroboam. He destroys the worship of Baal; he preserves the golden calves. His hand was ready to use the sword against the enemies of the Lord, when it suited his own ends; his heart was utterly indifferent to the law of the Lord. So we read, "Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart" (2 Kings 10:28-30).

God, in His righteous judgment, while using Jehu to deal with the wicked house of Ahab is not unmindful of the mixed motives that energised Jehu, and the fact that in carrying out the vengeance of the Lord, he was simply indulging his own cruel heart for his own ends. If God has to deal in judgment, it is His strange work. If Jehu undertakes to deal with evil, it is to him a congenial task. Hence it is that while God uses Jehu to execute judgment on Jezreel, yet He says, by the prophet Hosea, "I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu; and will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel" (Hosea 1:4).

19. THE DEATH OF ELISHA 2 Kings 13:14-25.

Elisha, at the direction of the Lord, had sent a young man to anoint Jehu as king. The young man having carried out his errand was instructed to flee, and not tarry with Jehu. The prophet thus clearly showing that between himself and this violent and unprincipled man there was nothing in common. Jehu, on his side, while willing to carry out instructions that accord with his ambitions, had no regard for the man of God. Thus during his reign, and that of his son, the prophet is entirely ignored. For a period of forty-five years we hear nothing of Elisha.

During these years the kings and the people depart from the Lord and pursue an evil course. Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord, the sins of Jeroboam are not departed from. His son, Jehoahaz, did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord. In consequence the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and they are delivered into the hands of their enemies (2 Kings 10:31-33 & 2 Kings 13:1-3). In the reign of Joash, the succeeding king, the long life of Elisha came to its close. Joash, wicked man though he was, could appreciate godliness in others. Doubtless he felt that the presence of Elisha in the land was a real power for good. Therefore, he was genuinely troubled at the approach of the prophet's death. The king weeps at the death-bed of Elisha, and appears to realize that the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof, that had rapt Elijah to heaven, were now waiting upon Elisha in his closing moments.

Joash, like his father and grandfather, had neglected the prophet in his life; and yet, when at length he visits him, he finds, even in the prophet's dying moments, that Elisha is strong in the delivering grace of the Lord. The king is told to take bow and arrows; to put his hand on the bow. Then Elisha put his hand on the king's hand, whereupon the king is bidden to shoot. Elisha interprets the act as symbolizing that the king's hand, strengthened by the hand of the representative of the Lord, would bring deliverance from his enemies. Is not the king thus reminded of how much he had lost by his neglect of the man of God? Had he but turned to the prophet before, would he not have found the power and mercy of God with him to deliver him from

all his enemies? Has the king even yet learnt his lesson? Elisha will put him to the test. The prophet seems to say, "I have shewn you the significance of this arrow — that it means a victory over your enemies now take arrows and smite upon the ground."

Alas! The faith of the king falls short of the resources of God. The king smote thrice and stayed. Had his faith been more simple would he not have emptied his quiver of arrows? There was power at his disposal to effect complete deliverance from the enemy; there was neither faith nor spiritual discernment to use it. How often, like the king, we are brought into circumstances in which only faith and spirituality will know how to act. Alas! Too often such circumstances discover our low condition. The king is rebuked for his lack of faith; though he is told that the mercy of the Lord will be exercised three times on his behalf. Thus the last utterance of this honoured servant of the Lord foretells the delivering mercy of the Lord, and is in keeping with the ministry of the grace of God that had characterised his long life.

It would seem by the allusion to "the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof" that king Joash anticipated that Elisha would be rapt to heaven after the pattern of Elijah. When, however, we come to the actual account of his end, there is no outward display of supernatural power. In striking contrast to the close of Elijah’s path, we have only the simple record, "Elisha died, and they buried him."

None the less, God will honour his devoted servant in His own way and time. God put great honour upon Moses by giving him a private burial. Perhaps, however, the greatest honour is reserved for Elisha, for, in keeping with his ministry of grace, God uses his death to illustrate the greatest of all the wonders of grace, the bringing life out of death. Thus, at the coming in of the year a dead man is buried in the sepulchre of Elisha, and, we read, touching the bones of Elisha, "he revived and stood upon his feet."

"When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see a seed," is written of the One of whom Elisha was only a type. When the Lord Jesus goes into death, He secures a seed. "Except the grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die; it bringeth forth much fruit." Is not this great mystery foreshadowed in this fine scene? The enemy held the people of God in bondage, death was upon them, and all man could do was to bury his dead. But when death comes in contact with one who typically had gone into death in grace — one who, as we might say, had refused to pass to glory by the chariot of horsemen, and had chosen the way of the grave — there is, as the glorious result, life and resurrection. The man revived and stood upon his feet. And, further, if there is life from the dead, there is also deliverance from the enemy; for we read, The Lord was gracious unto His people and "had compassion on them, and had respect unto them, because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them neither cast He them from His presence."

Thus closes the marvellous history of this man of God, whose high privilege it was to be an exponent of the grace of God in the midst of an apostate nation, and before an evil world.

Like a heavenly stranger he passes on his way morally apart from all, while in grace the servant of all, accessible alike to rich and poor. He is found in every condition of life; he comes into contact with every class of men; he moves at times within the land of Israel, and at times he passes beyond its bounds. But, wherever he is, in whatsoever circumstances he is found, with

whomsoever he comes in contact, his one unvarying business is to make known the grace of God. At times he is mocked; at times he is ignored and forgotten. at times men plot to take his life; but in spite of all opposition he pursues his service of love, removing the curse, preserving the lives of kings, feeding the hungry, helping the needy, healing the leper and raising the dead.

He allows nothing in his ways and manner of life that is inconsistent with his ministry of grace. He refuses the riches of this world, and the gifts of men, content himself to be poor that others may be enriched.

Thus he becomes a fitting type of that far greater One by whom grace and truth came into this world; who dwelt among us full of grace and truth; who became poor that we might be rich; who endured the contradiction of sinners, and who, at last gave up His life that grace might reign through righteousness.

Further, if Elisha is a type of the Christ who was to come, he is also the pattern for every believer in Christ, teaching us that, amidst all the circumstances of life, we should be the exponents, in a needy world, of the grace that has reached us in all our degradation in order to have us at last with, and like, the Man in the glory, where for ever we shall be to the praise of the glory of His grace.

S. Emmaus.

Emmaus.

Luke 24:1-53.

Hamilton Smith.

How varied are the conditions of soul in which the disciples were found on the resurrection morning. Peter was a backslider; Thomas a doubter; Mary Magdalene was desolate, and the two disciples, on the way to Emmaus, were disappointed. Moreover, it is blessed to see with what divine skill and perfect grace the Lord adapts Himself to those varying states of soul. He has a restoring word for backsliders, a reproving yet encouraging word for doubters, a comforting word for the desolate, and an arousing word to touch the heart and reach the conscience of the disappointed. The two disciples journeying to Emmaus may well be described as disappointed saints. Like other believers, driven by their need and drawn by His grace, they had been attracted to Jesus. They had seen His mighty acts of power, listened to His words of grace, and followed His holy pathway of love. They were convinced that He was indeed the long promised Messiah, and confidently expected that the Roman yoke was about to be broken, and Israel redeemed by power from all their enemies. But alas! the chief priests and rulers had delivered their Messiah to death. Instead of taking His throne as King of kings, He had been nailed to a cross between two malefactors. Instead of making His enemies His footstool, His enemies had trodden underfoot the Son of God. All their hopes were thus rudely dashed to the ground. They were deeply disappointed saints. The result of this disappointment is soon made manifest. They turn their backs on the little company of believers at Jerusalem and, without hesitation, they went "the same day" to their home at Emmaus; and as these two wandered on their way they ’reasoned’ (Luke 24:15); and as they reasoned they were ’sad’ (Luke 24:17). So to-day are there not many disheartened and disappointed saints who, in like manner, turn their backs on the company of the Lord’s people and wander off into a solitary path? And as such pursue their lonely way, are they not full of reasonings and sadness?

But, we may enquire, what was the root of the disappointment of the Emmaus disciples? This — they were occupied with their own thoughts about Christ rather than God’s thoughts. And with minds possessed by human thoughts they were unable to grasp divine thoughts — they were "slow of heart to believe" all that the prophets have spoken. Unbelief was at the back of their disappointment. Unbelief turned their feet away from the Lord’s people; unbelief set their tongues reasoning, filled their hearts with sadness, and held their eyes fast closed so that they could not discern the Lord. And what was the unbelieving thought that possessed their minds? Simply that they thought to bring Christ back into their circumstances for their temporal glory, and their earthly ease and blessing. Are we not often like these disciples? Is it not a common thought with many Christians that Christ came into the world to make it a better and a happier place? Do we not at times still try to bring Christ back into our circumstances for our temporal comfort and earthly glory? And with such thoughts in our minds do we not fall into great disappointment when we find

our circumstances difficult, and that identification with the Lord’s people throws us into the company of the poor and despised of this world, involves contempt and reproach, and, it may be, even loss and suffering? And yet how graciously the Lord pursues His wandering and disappointed saints. How blessed the way He takes to restore and hearten up these sad and downcast disciples on the way to Emmaus. First He "draws near" and it is "Jesus Himself" draws near. No messenger is sent to recall to His presence these erring saints. When all goes well with His people, angels, apostles, prophets and others may carry out His behests, as well we know in many a fine scene recorded in the Word. But is there a wandering sheep — dejected and disappointed — behold, "JESUS HIMSELF" will draw near to restore. There is work to be done between a wandering saint and "Jesus Himself" with which no stranger can intermeddle. "The Lord hath risen indeed and hath appeared to Simon" tells the same blessed tale of a secret and personal interview between a broken-hearted backslider and "Jesus Himself". How different, alas, the way we often take with one another. Does a brother wander away from us, how apt we are to draw away from him. But in the day that the Emmaus saints drew away, Jesus Himself drew near. What a Saviour! when we were far away He came near, and when we draw away He draws near.

Having drawn near, how gracious the way He takes. He discovers to us all that is in our hearts. With divine wisdom and infinite tenderness He drew out all the difficulties of the two disciples, and disclosed the root of unbelief that was behind their disappointment. They were " slow to believe". Nor does He stop there, for the discovery of what is in our hearts, however important in the work of restoration, is not sufficient to restore. We need indeed true thoughts of our hearts to learn how we wander into a wrong path; but we must have true thoughts of His heart that our feet may be restored to a right path. And this is the way the Lord takes with the two disciples. Having exposed all that was in their hearts, He reveals all that is in His heart. And revealing what is in His heart turns their "slow hearts" into "burning hearts" (Luke 24:25, Luke 24:32). He sets their hearts ablaze with love to Himself by revealing the love that is in His heart. To reveal the love of His heart He expounds "to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself". And as He expounds He passes before them the touching story of His sufferings and His glories (Luke 24:26). The disciples, with their poor human thoughts, would have spared Him the sufferings, and so withheld from Him His glories. We know He must needs suffer "to enter into His glory".

What in all the Scriptures concerning Himself so touches the heart as the sufferings and the glories of Christ. And when we find the sufferings, we are not far from the glories. Psalms 22:1-31 speaks of His sufferings, Psalms 24:1-10 of His glories. Again the story of the sufferings is taken up in Psalms 69:1-36, to be followed by the glories in Psalms 72:1-20. So in like manner the sufferings of Christ in Psalms 109:1-31 are followed by the glories of Christ in Psalms 110:1-7. As we look back to His sufferings and on to His glories, our hearts may well burn as we think of the love that led Him to the cross that He might lead us into the glory. The two disciples had been thinking of the things concerning themselves, the Lord leads them to "the things concerning Himself". Their desire was to bring Christ into their circumstances. He would lead them into His, and to know Him as the Risen One outside this present evil world. The Lord had exposed their hearts and revealed His heart, but to what end? Clearly to lead them to desire His company above all else. Now He will test them to see if the " end of the Lord" is reached. So it came to pass having arrived at the village, whither they went, "He made as though He would have gone further". He had drawn near to win their hearts, He will now draw away to lead out their hearts in longing desire

after Him. And very blessedly they respond to the testing of the Lord. "They constrained Him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." He wants them — had endured the sufferings of the cross to possess them — but He has so dealt with them that at last they want Him. Have we so learnt the evil of our hearts in the presence of the love of His heart that we can say we desire His company above all else? Search throughout the length and breadth of God’s great universe and where shall I find another who knows me through and through, and yet loves me. This it is that makes us more at home in His presence than in the presence of the nearest and dearest on earth. And such is His love that we can have as much of Christ and His company as we desire. Thus the disciples found when they "constrained Him" and the Lord loves to be constrained — for do we not read, "He went in to tarry with them"?

Thus at last the Lord does come for a brief moment into their circumstances, but only to lead them out of their circumstances into His. For having made Himself known He vanishes out of their sight. How touching also the way by which He makes Himself known. " He took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. " Would it not at once recall that other scene, when in the upper room " He took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it and gave unto them saying, This is My body which is given for you"? The whole act proclaimed who He was, and recalled His dying love. Little wonder that " their eyes were opened and they knew Him". Yes! but how did they know Him? Not as in the days before the cross, in their circumstances, but as the One who was dead but is alive for evermore. Immediately He vanishes out of their sight. For if we know Him as the Risen One, it can only be by faith while yet we are in this scene. The disappointment that had possessed the disciples when they lost Him on earth, was changed to delight when they found Him in resurrection. The immediate result is, they are recalled from their wanderings. In spite of having walked eight or nine miles, and though the day was far spent, and the night fast drawing on, they at once retrace their steps in their earnest desire to join the little company of the Lord’s people gathered together at Jerusalem. And having reached their own company they find, to their great delight, they are in the company of the Risen Lord, and in His company there is no room for dissatisfied or disappointed hearts. There all reasonings and all sadness give place to "wonder", "worship", and "great joy" (Luke 24:41, Luke 24:52).

S. Epistles of Christ

Epistles of Christ 2 Corinthians 3:1-18.

Hamilton Smith. In the Third Chapter of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians the Apostle Paul brings Christ before our souls in three ways.

First, Christ is presented as written upon the hearts of the believers that formed the Assembly at Corinth (2 Corinthians 3:3).

Secondly, Christ is presented as manifested to "all men" by this Assembly (2 Corinthians 3:2-3).

Thirdly, Christ is presented as a living Person in the glory — the Object before these believers (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Thus there passes before us God’s intention that, during the absence of Christ from this world, there should be gatherings of believers on earth who have Christ written upon their hearts; Christ manifested in their lives; and Christ before them as an Object in the glory. As we read the last touching instructions of the Lord to His disciples, and as we reverently listen to the Lord’s prayer to the Father, we are made conscious that underlying both the discourses and the prayer, there is ever kept before us the great truth that believers are left in this world to represent Christ — the Man that has gone to glory. It is God’s intention that though Christ personally is no longer here, yet Christ morally should still be seen in His people. Further, it is manifest, that all the Epistles press upon us our privilege, and our responsibility, as believers, to represent the character of Christ to a world that has rejected and cast Him out. In the addresses to the Seven Churches in Revelation, we are permitted to view the Lord walking in the midst of the Churches taking account of their condition, and giving us His judgment as to how far they have answered to, or failed in, their responsibility. In result we learn that the great mass of those who profess His Name, have, not only entirely failed to represent His character before the world, but have become so hopelessly corrupt and indifferent to Himself that in the end, they will be spued out of His mouth and thus utterly rejected. Nevertheless, we also learn that in the midst of this vast profession there will be, until the end of the Church’s history on earth, some who, though they have but a little strength, will answer to His mind by setting forth something of the loveliness of His character.

Seeing, then, that it is still possible, even in a day of ruin, to express something of the character of Christ, surely everyone who loves the Lord will say, "I would like to answer to the Lord’s mind and be of the number who, in some little measure, manifest something of the beautiful traits of Christ to the world around."

It is true that it is possible for the world to form some estimate of Christ from the Word of God; but, apart from the Word — which they may call in question, or fail to understand, even if read — it is God’s intention that in the lives of His people there should be a presentation of Christ "known and read of all men." This being so, it becomes a searching question for us all, "if the men of this world are to gain their impression of Christ from the gatherings of His people, what conclusion will they

reach as to Christ, as they look upon our individual lives; as well as the collective life of God's people?" Let us remember the Lord's searching words, "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples if ye have love one to another." Apply such a test to the gathering with which we may be connected, and should we not have to hang our heads with shame as we recall occasions when envy, evil speaking, and backbiting, were more in evidence than the meekness and gentleness of Christ. Let us remember that whatever the circumstances — even if called to face reproaches and insults — our one business should be to set forth the character of Christ. One has said, "It is better to lose your coat, than to let go the character of Christ."

If then we would answer to the Lord's mind and set forth His character before the world, we shall do well to heed the teaching of the Apostle in this portion of the Word.

1. CHRIST WRITTEN ON THE HEART

First, then, let us notice that the Apostle speaks of these believers as "the epistle of Christ". He does not say the "epistles" but the "epistle", for he is not thinking simply of what is true of individuals, but of the whole company, though, obviously, the company is composed of individuals.

Then let us remark, that Apostle does not say "Ye should be the epistle of Christ", but that "Ye are the epistle of Christ". Entertaining the wrong thought that we ought to be epistles of Christ, we shall set to work to become such by our own efforts. This would not only lead us into legal occupation with ourselves, but would also shut out the work of "the Spirit of the living God". The fact is that we become epistles of Christ, not by our own efforts but by the Spirit of God writing Christ upon our hearts. A Christian is one to whom Christ has become precious by a work of the Spirit in the heart. It is not simply a knowledge of Christ in the head, which an unconverted man may have, that constitutes a man a Christian, but Christ written in the heart. As sinners we discover our need of Christ, and are burdened with our sins. We find relief by discovering that Christ by His propitiatory work has died for our sins, and that God has set forth His acceptance of that work by seating Christ in the glory. We rest in God's satisfaction with Christ and His work, and our affections are drawn out to the One through whom we have been blessed. "Unto you therefore which believe He is precious." Thus Christ is written on our hearts and we become the epistle of Christ. If we are not the epistle of Christ we are not Christians at all.

2. CHRIST MANIFESTED TO ALL MEN

Having set forth the true Christian company as composed of believers upon whose hearts Christ has been written, the Apostle presents the second great truth when he says, not only "Ye are the epistle of Christ", but also, "Ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ" "known and read of all men."

It is one thing for a gathering of believers to be an epistle of Christ, and quite another for the gathering to be in such a right condition that they manifest to all men something of the character of Christ. The responsibility of any gathering of saints is, not to walk well in order to become an epistle, but, seeing they are an epistle of Christ to walk well in order that the epistle may be read of all men. If anyone writes a letter of commendation it is to commend the person named in the letter. So when the Spirit of God writes Christ on the hearts of believers, it is in order that they together may become an epistle of commendation to commend Christ to the world around. That by their holy and separate walk, their mutual love to one another, their lowliness and meekness, their

gentleness and grace, they may set forth the lovely character of Christ.

Thus it was with the Corinthian saints. They had, indeed, been walking in a disorderly way: but, as the result of the Apostle's first letter, they had cleared themselves from evil so that the Apostle can now say, not only that as an Assembly they were an epistle of Christ, but, that they were an epistle "known and read of all men".

Alas! the writing may become indistinct, but it does not cease to be a letter because it is blotted and blurred. Christians are often like the writing on some ancient tomb stone. There are faint indications of an inscription, a capital letter, here and there, would indicate some name was once written on the stone. But it is so weatherworn, and dirt-begrimed, that it is hardly possible to decipher the writing. So, alas, may it be with ourselves. When first the Spirit writes Christ upon the hearts of a company of saints, their affections are warm and their collective life speaks plainly of Christ. The writing, being fresh and clear, is known and read of all men. But, as time passes, unless there is watchfulness, and self-judgment, envying, strife, and bitterness, may creep in, and the gathering cease to give any true impression of Christ.

Nevertheless, in spite of all our failure, Christians are the epistle of Christ and it ever remains true that it is God's great intention that all men should see the character of Christ set forth in His people. Here, then, we have a beautiful description of the true Christian company. It is a company of individual believers, gathered to Christ, upon whose hearts Christ has been written, not with ink, but "with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart". As in the tables of stone of old, men could read what the righteousness of God demanded from man under law, so, now, in the lives of God's people, the world should read what the love of God brings to man under grace.

3. CHRIST THE OBJECT IN GLORY

How then, we may ask, is the writing of Christ on the hearts of God's people to be kept clear and legible, so that, in the gathering of God's people the character of Christ can be manifest to all men? The answer to this question brings us to the third great truth of the chapter. Christ will be manifested to all men only as we have before us the living Christ in the glory as our Object. So the Apostle writes, "We all looking on the glory of the Lord with unveiled face, are transformed according to the same image from glory to glory" (v. 18, N. Tr.). There is a transforming power in beholding the Lord in glory. This transforming power is available for all believers — the youngest as well as the oldest; "we all, " not simply "we Apostles", beholding the glory of the Lord "are changed into the same image". This change is not affected by our own efforts, nor by wearying ourselves in the endeavour to be like the Lord. Nor is it by seeking to imitate some devoted saint. It is by beholding the glory of the Lord. There is no veil on His face, and as we behold Him, not only every veil of darkness will pass from our hearts, but morally we shall become increasingly like Him, changing from glory to glory. Gazing upon the Lord in glory we are lifted above all the weakness and failure that we find in ourselves, and all the evil around, to discover and delight in His perfection. As the bride in the Song of Songs can say, "I sat down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste." In the course of the Epistle the Apostle gives us a taste of some of this precious fruit. Turning to 2 Corinthians 5:14, that "the love of Christ constraineth us." Here the love of Christ is presented as the true motive for all ministry, whether to saints or sinners. The greatest expression of that love was His death. "Greater love hath no man

than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Again we read, "Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it." With such love before his soul the Apostle can well say, "that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves but unto Him which died for them and rose again." In the light of this Scripture we may well challenge our hearts as to the motive that actuates us in all our service. Is it the love of Christ that constrains us, or is it the love of self, Are we living unto ourselves, or are we living "unto Him", and thus, like Him, willing to forget self in order to serve others in love. One has said, "Alas! how often have we to reproach ourselves with going on in a round of Christian duty, faithful in general intention, but not flowing from the fresh realization of the love of Christ to our soul." (J.N.D.).

Passing to 2 Corinthians 8:9, we come to another lovely characteristic of Christ. There we read of "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" The Apostle is pleading on behalf of the poor Jewish believers, urging the richer Corinthian saints to help in meeting their necessities. In both 2 Corinthians 8:6 and 2 Corinthians 8:7, he speaks of giving as a "grace". Then he sets before us Christ as the One in whom we have a transcendent example of the grace of giving. He was rich, surpassingly rich, and yet to meet our deep needs He not only gives, but, such is His grace that, He becomes poor to give. "For your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich." By the incarnation He became poor, and His poverty is witnessed by the manger at Bethlehem and the humble home at Nazareth, and that, in the days of His ministry He Himself said, the "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head" (Luke 9:58). To reach a poor fallen woman and bring heaven’s best gifts to earth’s worst sinners, He became a poor, needy, and lonely man by a well side. The very moment when He is enriching us with a fountain of water springing up unto eternal life He Himself has become so poor that he has to ask for a drink of water (John 4:7, John 4:14).

Turning to 2 Corinthians 10:1, we find some more refreshing fruit that marked the life of Christ. First we read of "the meekness of Christ" The Apostle is correcting the spirit of rivalry that had been working amongst the Corinthian saints, whereby some of the gifted servants were measuring themselves with one another, and seeking to commend themselves. So doing they were walking in the flesh, and warring after the flesh, glorying in their gifts, talking about themselves, boasting in their work, and belittling the Apostle. To correct their vanity and self-assertiveness, he brings before them the meekness of Christ who never asserted His rights, or defended Himself; who, when He was reviled, reviled not again. The chief priests may defame Him, but "Jesus held His peace"; He is falsely accused before Pilate, but "He answered him to never a word". He is mocked by Herod, but "He answered him nothing". Good for us, if, in the presence of defamation and insults we could catch something of the spirit of the Lord and show the meekness that refuses to assert our rights, stand upon our dignity, or defend ourselves.

Then the Apostle speaks of "the gentleness of Christ". Another lovely quality that He ever exhibited in the presence of opposition. Seeking to obey the word of the Lord and maintain the truth we shall soon find that there are those who will oppose and raise questions that lead to strife. But the servant of "the Lord must not strive" but seek to act in the spirit of the Lord and be "gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient". The gentleness of Christ speaks of the manner in which He acted and spoke. How often, with ourselves, even if our motive is right, and the principles we stand for are true, all is spoilt because our manner is lacking in graciousness and gentleness. Let us remember the striking words of the Psalmist. "Thy gentleness hath made me great" (Psalms

18:35). Our vehemence may easily degenerate into violence by which we belittle ourselves in the eyes of others; but gentleness will make us great. Violence draws out violence; but gentleness is irresistible. "The fruit of the Spirit . . . is gentleness."

Finally, in 2 Corinthians 12:9, we read of "the power of Christ". The Apostle is speaking of bodily infirmities, insults, necessities, persecutions and distresses. He learned by experience that all these things only become an occasion for the manifestation of "the power of Christ" to preserve the believer through the trials and lift him above them. Thus we learn that whatever the trial, His "grace is sufficient", and His "strength is made perfect in weakness".

Thus, with our eyes upon Christ in the glory, we are reminded by the Apostle of the perfections of Christ as He passes before us.

"The love of Christ", "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ", "The meekness of Christ", "The gentleness of Christ", and "The power of Christ". As we look at Christ in the glory and admire these lovely moral traits, set forth in all their perfection in Christ, we find His fruit sweet to our taste, and, almost unconsciously to ourselves, shall begin to exhibit something of His gracious character, and thus become changed into His image.

Thus the Holy Spirit not only writes Christ on the heart so that we become epistles of Christ, but, by engaging our hearts with Christ in glory, He transforms us into His image and so keeps the writing clear that it may be read of all men.

What a wonderful testimony it would be if the world could look upon any little company of the Lord’s people and see in them "love", and "grace", and "meekness", and "gentleness", and a "power" that enables them to rise above all circumstances. May we realise, in deeper measure, that it is the mind of God that His people should be the epistle of Christ to manifest Christ to all men, by having Christ in the glory before us as our one Object.

S. Fruit-bearing and Testimony.

Fruit-bearing and Testimony.

John 15:18.

Hamilton Smith. In John 13:1-38 there is presented to us the Lord’s gracious service for His people, that, during the time of His absence, they may have communion, or "part," with Him where He is in the Father’s house. In John 14:1-31 the Lord comforts our hearts by telling us of the coming of the Holy Spirit, whereby it will be possible for Christ to be with us, as He can say, of the one that keeps His commandments, "I will love Him and will manifest Myself to him." Again, speaking of the Father and Himself, "We will come unto him and make our abode with Him" (John 14:21, John 14:23). Our having part with Christ, where He is, and Christ having part with us where we are, prepares us for the fruit-bearing brought before us in John 15:1-27. The discourse opens with the presentation of the Lord as the true Vine, the Father as the Husbandman, and the disciples as the branches. To save any misconception as to the passage, it is important to remember that the discourse does not contemplate Christ as the Head, and believers as forming His body, as set forth in the Epistles of Paul. It presents Christ and those who profess to be His disciples on earth. Viewing believers as members of the body of Christ we think of their heavenly privileges as united to the Head in heaven. Into this body nothing unreal can come, and from this body no member can be taken away. If, however, we look at believers as disciples of the Lord we think of their responsibility to bear His character, and thus represent Him in the world from which He is absent. Amongst these disciples there may be found false professors, who are but dead branches fit only for the burning. To follow the teaching of the passage we may ask ourselves three questions: (1) What is the fruit of which the Lord speaks? (2) What are the means taken that the true disciples may be fruitful? (3) What is the great end in view in fruit-bearing? What then does the Lord mean when He speaks of fruit? May we not say that fruit is all that in our lives which is agreeable to God? It follows that only that which is of Christ in us can be for the Father’s delight. We may therefore say, that fruit is the character of Christ reproduced in the lives of His disciples. We read in Galatians 5:22, that "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, self-control" (N. Tn.). These are the very qualities that marked Christ in His path down here, and that called forth the Father’s expression of pleasure, for the voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son in whom I have found my delight." Fruit, then, is not simply preaching and teaching, or activity in different forms of service, or in this passage even souls won for Christ through the preaching, but rather the beautiful qualities of Christ seen in the souls that are won. Alas! it is possible to be very active in Christian service and yet exhibit very little of the character of Christ in the life, and, therefore, bring forth but little fruit for the delight of the Father. Moreover, let us remember that what goes up to God as fruit, goes out to man as testimony. These two thoughts are expressed by the Lord’s words, "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." The life that glorifies the Father and delights His heart becomes a testimony to the world that we are Christ’s disciples. That we are truly His disciples will be far more manifest by a little meekness and gentleness, than by any amount of activity. Mary’s

quiet dependence upon the Lord, that led her to sit at His feet and hear His word, brought forth fruit that was far more pleasing to the heart of Christ than all Martha's sincere energy. We are not all called or gifted to take an active part in preaching or teaching, or many other forms of service; but it is open to all — the youngest as the oldest believer — to express in our life the beautiful traits of Christ, and thus bring forth fruit for the Father and testimony before men. Christ, personally, is no longer on earth; but God desires that Christ, morally, should still be seen in His people. In the measure in which this is true there will be fruit and testimony.

How, then, is fruit produced in the lives of Christ's disciples? (John 15:1). First, let us mark the Lord's words, "I am the true Vine." The fruit of the vine is found in the branches, and the branches can only be fruitful as they are livingly connected with the Vine. Christ is the source of the believer's life. Nature can, at times, exhibit many amiable qualities, but cannot produce the lovely character of the One Who made Himself of no reputation in order to serve others in love. Apart from Christ — the source of life — there can be no fruit for the Father. In order that we may bear fruit, "bring forth more fruit," and "much fruit," the Lord's words indicate that there is what the Father does; what He, Himself, does, and what we ourselves can do. (V. 2) First there are the Father's dealings in discipline and chastening. From the figure used, it would seem that it is possible to be a branch in vital link with the vine and yet be unfruitful. Such the husbandman "taketh away." This would be an extreme form of chastening of which, perhaps, the New Testament gives us a solemn example in the case of some in the Assembly at Corinth whose lives were so dishonouring to the Lord that they were taken away by death, as we read, "many are weak and sickly among you and many sleep" (1 Corinthians 11:30-32). There are, moreover, the dealings of the Father with those who bear fruit that they may "bring forth more fruit." Of such the Lord says, "every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it." Thus we read, in Hebrews 12:1-29, that if the Father chastens us it is "for our profit that we might be partakers of His holiness." The trials that we pass through, the sorrows by the way, the sicknesses that are allowed to come upon us, the bereavements that break our hearts, and the insults that we may have to meet are all allowed by a Father who loves us, in order that we may detect and judge all that is wrong in our thoughts and words and ways, so that Christ may be formed in us, and that we may bring forth fruit by exhibiting something of the lovely character of Christ.

(V.3) Secondly, there is that which the Lord, Himself, does in order that we may bear fruit. Already He had washed His disciples' feet; as He can say, "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." This would indicate that the feet-washing of John 13:1-38 : that enables us to have communion with Christ, prepares us to set forth in our lives the excellencies of Christ. (John 15:4-5) Thirdly, there is not only the Father's dealings with us, and the Lord's gracious service for us, but our own part in leading to a fruitful life. Do we desire that our lives may become beautiful by expressing in some little measure the loveliness of Christ, then we do well to heed the Lord's words, "Abide in Me." What is the significance of these words, repeated in these verses so many times? Do they not imply a loving and personal dependence upon Christ that would keep us close to Himself, living in the sunshine of His love? Very blessed it is to help, and minister to one another; but abiding in Christ is not dependence upon ministry, or looking to a servant of the Lord, however right at times. It is personal dependence upon the Lord, and looking to Himself. Thus the bride, in the Song of Songs, can say "I sat down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste." Seeing the lovely traits set forth in perfection in Christ, we shall delight in

this excellent fruit; and, occupied with Him we shall become marked by that which we find sweet to our taste. Beholding the glory of the Lord we "are changed into the same image from glory to glory (2 Corinthians 3:18). Then let us mark well the Lord’s words, "Without Me ye can do nothing." A truth we all acknowledge but often forget. We need one another as this discourse, and many another precious Scripture plainly indicates, but above all we need Christ, for, in the matter of bearing fruit, without Him we can do nothing. (John 15:6) The Lord’s words present the solemn case of a dead branch — a mere lifeless professor, one who may profess great activity but have no vital link with Christ, and therefore bear no fruit for the Father. Nothing of the character of Christ is seen in such. He is not simply "taken away" as in the case supposed in John 15:2, but he is "cast forth" as a dead and withered branch and burned. Was not Judas a solemn example of one who made a fair profession before men, but in whom there was no vital link with Christ? (John 15:7-8) Finally, the Lord encourages by setting before us the blessedness of bearing fruit: — (1) as regards ourselves, by abiding in Christ and thus bearing the character of Christ, we shall have the mind of Christ as expressed in His words, and thus be able to pray according to His mind and receive answers to our prayers. (2) Bearing fruit we shall bring glory to the Father by setting forth the character of Christ Who was the perfect expression of the Father. (3) By wearing the character of Christ we shall become witnesses before the world that we are truly His disciples, and thus become the witnesses in this world of that blessed Man who is in the glory. The Lord does not say, "If ye preach ye shall be my disciples," but if "ye bear much fruit." The witness to Christ is found in the lives of disciples. It is a living witness!

HAMILTON SMITH.

Chapter 18

S. Gleanings on the Church.

Gleanings on the Church.

Hamilton Smith.

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Poem

Foreword

Hamilton Smith was an early twentieth century writer well known among those commonly known as "brethren." His writings have been much used by God for the edification, exhortation and comfort of many of God’s dear people, and are recognized for their scriptural soundness and depth. Yet they are written with simplicity and clarity so that those both younger and older in the things of God may alike enjoy and profit from the truths set forth therein. The three short articles which comprise this new book were originally published individually in pamphlet form. They are republished herein as written, except for some very minor editing, to clarify punctuation and an occasional older word, to help the modern reader. These three articles were combined because we felt that they uniquely fit together to present:

· the facts as to the true Church of God.

· The God-honoring pathway for each believer to walk as part of that true Church; also showing how easily failure can come in.

· the future glory that awaits the Church when we "live and reign with Christ for a thousand years."

How refreshing, enlightening and encouraging to read such ministry! We would encourage every Christian, and specially younger ones, to read this book — and to do so with an open Bible and with the heart lifted up in prayer that the Holy Spirit will first make the truth clear and then give the grace to act accordingly, cost what it may.

Throughout this book, the English words assembly and Church are both used to translate the Greek word ecclesia (called-out ones). When the first letter of the word is capitalized, it refers to the entire Church or Assembly of Christ, the body and Bride of Christ. When not capitalized, the local church or assembly, the local representation of the whole Church, is in view.

R. P. Daniels (Ed.) 1983

Note: The abbreviation JND stands for the very accurate "New Translation" of the Bible by John Nelson Darby. KJV stands for the King James Version.

Section 1 Outside The Camp

Introduction In this section, the Scriptural differences between Judaism and Christianity are set forth point by point, including what it means to "go forth therefore unto Him (Christ) without the camp, bearing His reproach" (Hebrews 13:13). Given are the Scriptural reasons for believers to leave the religious systems and sects of men and to gather unto the Name and Person of our Lord Jesus Christ in the simple manner and in the glorious position that the Word of God sets forth for all believers. Scripture makes it very clear that all believers of our present dispensation are members, from the moment of their salvation, of the only Church recognized in Scripture, the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18). Thus they do not need to join any other "church," but simply walk in the pathway of Scripture that answers to their wonderful position as members of that only true Church (Ed.).

Outside The Camp

"This spake He of the Spirit, which they who believe on Him should receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:39).

"Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach" (Hebrews 13:13). In the Gospel of John, we have in Christ the presentation of that which is entirely new upon the earth. The religious system that existed before the coming of Christ — before "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" — is set aside in view of the introduction of Christianity. In the first chapter the law of Moses gives place to "grace and truth" which "came by Jesus Christ." In the second chapter the Jewish temple is set aside by "the temple of His body. " In John 3:1-36 "earthly things" give place to "heavenly things." In John 4:1-54 the failing waters of this present passing life give way to "the fountain of water springing up into everlasting life," and Jerusalem-worship is set aside for the worship of the Father in spirit and truth. In John 15:1-47, the whole legal system with the pool, the angel and the sabbath is set aside by the all-powerful voice of the Son of God. In John 6:1-71 the natural bread, sustaining natural life, is thrown into the shade by "the bread which came down from heaven" to give and sustain a new and heavenly life. John 7:1-53 brings rivers of living water into this dry and barren world. John 8:1-59 and John 9:1-41 bring the light of life into a world of darkness and death. In John 10:1-42 the Christian flock takes the place of the Jewish fold, and

finally in John 11:1-57, the Son of God, acting in the mighty power of resurrection life, annuls the power of death and the grave. We will look at these two systems — the old and the new — under eleven points in that which follows.

ONE

Old things pass away and in Christ there is the introduction of all things new. But further, we have brought before us the two great outstanding facts of the Christian period on the basis of which the new things of Christianity are established, and by which the truth of Christianity is maintained. These two distinguishing facts are prophetically announced in John 7:39. On the last and great day of the feast — the day that looks on to a new world of satisfied desire — the Lord invites all the world to come unto Him and drink. He also speaks of the present result for the one who comes. Such would become a channel of refreshment in this needy world. Then we are definitely told that the Lord is speaking of the Holy Spirit which they who believe on Him should receive. True believers companied with the Lord in His earthly path, but they had not received the Holy Spirit. Then we are told that the gift of the Holy Spirit on earth awaited the presence of Christ in the glory, as we read "The Holy Spirit was not yet given because that Jesus was not yet glorified." Here then we have the two great distinguishing features of Christianity.

1. There is a Man in the glory.

2. There is a Divine Person on earth.

Christ as Son of Man is seated in the glory, the Holy Spirit — a Divine Person — is present on earth.

TWO

There are four great outstanding facts that every Christian should cherish. First, the Cross; second, Christ’s session in the glory; third, the Holy Spirit’s presence on earth, and fourth, the second coming of Christ. All true Christians rightly make much of the Cross; very generally, too, they look for the second coming of Christ. But sadly, the two central facts are almost ignored and their significance lost, and yet those two central facts are the distinguishing marks of the present dispensation. The blessings of the Cross are not confined to this present period. Every saint of every age, whether past, present or future, finds in the Cross the righteous basis of all blessing. Nor can the coming of Christ be confined to the saints of the present period. This great event in one form or another will affect every saint of every dispensation. But the two great intermediate facts give to Christianity its unique character and distinguish the Christian period from all that went before and all that is yet to come. Never before in this world’s history could it be said that there is a Man in the glory and a Divine Person on earth, and never again will it be true. These facts belong exclusively to the Christian period, and upon them the Church is established and by them the Church is maintained. Not until Christ was glorified as the risen, exalted Head, and the Holy Spirit come to baptize believers into one Body could the Church be formed, and in its pathway through this world it is maintained by Christ in the glory and the Holy Spirit on earth. Even its last passage from the earthly journey to the heavenly home will be taken in answer to the voice of the Man in the glory and the quickening power of the Holy Spirit on earth (1 Thessalonians 4:16; Romans 8:11).

If these then are the distinguishing marks of the Christian period, it should hardly surprise us if they become the unceasing object of the enemy's attack. The devil knows full well that if he can succeed in obscuring these two truths, he will succeed in robbing us of every true thought of "Christ and the Church." He cares not if we are legal saints after the pattern of a former dispensation or if we seek to be millennial saints after the pattern of the world to come, if only he can prevent our being heavenly saints according to God's purpose for the present moment. The unceasing hostility of the enemy is ever shown in seeking to rob Christ of His glory and the saints of their blessings. If however by the grace of God these two great facts are received and maintained in power in our souls, we shall have the key to the Christian period and the way of recovery of the truth of that great mystery — Christ and the Church.

THREE In the early chapters of the Acts we have the record of the historical fulfilment of these two outstanding facts. In the first chapter, Christ is received up into glory. As He stood, as the risen One in the midst of His disciples, having uttered His last words, "He was taken up and a cloud received Him out of their sight." In the second chapter the Holy Spirit is received on earth. The disciples "were all together in one place (JND) and there came suddenly a sound out of heaven as of a rushing mighty wind and filled all the house where they were sitting. And they appeared to them cloven tongues of fire and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit." The immediate result is that the disciples are baptized into one body, united to Christ the Head in heaven. The Church is formed, the gospel is preached, the dreadful works of men are exposed, the wonderful works of God are declared, three thousand souls are converted, and additions are made to the Church daily.

Thus there is found on earth an assembly of people apart from this world, belonging to another world, drawing all their resources from Christ in the glory and controlled by the Holy Spirit on earth.

FOUR The effect of these two great facts upon the individual saint is strikingly set forth in the history of Stephen. In this devoted servant we see a characteristic-saint of the Christian period, according to God's thought, and hence the display of the moral features which should have marked the whole Church during the absence of Christ. The closing verses of Acts 7:1-60 present a man on earth indwelt by a Divine Person — the Holy Spirit — and drawing all his resources from a Man in the glory. As we read "He being full of the Holy Spirit, looked up stedfastly into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55). Blessed effects follow:

1. He "looked up." A man on earth full of the Holy Spirit looks up! Such an one is not indifferent to what is within or what is around, but characteristically he is not marked by looking within or looking around. To look within is to be depressed, to look around is to be confused, but to look up is to see no man anymore except Jesus only.

2. He looked up "stedfastly." As a better translation has it, he "fixed his eyes" on another scene and refused to be distracted by the evil of this world on the one hand, or detained by its attractions on the other.

3. He "looked up stedfastly into heaven." The man filled with the Holy Spirit is linked with heaven while passing through the earth. Such an one realizes that he is a partaker of the heavenly calling. Insomuch as we yield to the control of the Holy Spirit, we shall be led into the heavenly calling

even as Rebekah of old, consenting to go with the servant, was led from the land of her fathers to have part with Isaac in a new land (Genesis 24:1-67). Ignoring the presence of the Holy Spirit the Church has settled down in the earth, quieting its conscience by much zeal for the good of man.

4. Stephen, looking up to heaven, sees "the glory of God." Everything in this world speaks of the glory of man. But the man filled with the Holy Spirit is no longer occupied with the fading glory of dying men, but looks into a scene where everything and everyone speaks of the glory of God. "In His temple doth everyone say, Glory" (Psalms 29:9, JND)!

5. Not only does he see glory, but he sees the glory of God "and Jesus." He sees a Man in the glory. In the brightest spot of the universe, where God is fully displayed in all His infinite perfections, he sees a Man. All other men may come short of the glory of God, but at last a man is found — the Man Christ Jesus — who has answered to the glory, maintained the glory and passed into the glory. The chapter opens with the God of glory appearing to a man on earth and ends with a Man appearing in the glory of God in heaven.

6. Furthermore the Man whom he sees in heaven — Jesus — is standing on "the right hand of God." Not only is there a Man in the glory, but that Man is set in the place of supreme power and honour. The One who came into the world in circumstances of weakness, who passed through it as a poor Man, who in passing out of it was crucified in weakness, in heaven now holds the place of highest power and glory.

Every mark of dark dishonour, Heaped upon the thorn-crowned brow, All the depths of His heart’s sorrow Told in answering glory now.

7. Lastly, Stephen can say, "Behold I see the heavens opened." There has been unrolled before his vision a heavenly scene wherein he sees the glory of God. In the glory he sees a Man — the Man Christ Jesus, and that Man he sees in the place of supreme power. But he sees more; he sees that the heavens are opened so that all the glory and the power of the Man in heaven is at the disposal of a man on earth. If the Lord Jesus has gone back to heaven to occupy a place of supreme power, He has left the heavens open behind Him so that all the love and power and grace of the Man in heaven may stream down upon a man on earth. The result of this seven-fold vision, if we may so speak, is very blessedly set forth in the closing scene of Stephen’s earthly life. He is a man on earth controlled by the Holy Spirit, and consequently drawing all his resources from Christ in glory. In result we see in Stephen a beautiful example of a man on earth in the midst of the most terrible circumstances, supported by the Man in heaven. We further see that just as the man on earth is supported by the Man in the glory, so the Man in the glory is represented in the man on earth. Stephen, lifted above all thought of self, becomes a shining witness to the character of Christ in heaven. Like his Master he prays for his enemies, commits his spirit to the Lord and leads the long line of martyrs by sealing his testimony with his blood. In Stephen then we are permitted to see the practical results that flow from an individual believer being controlled by the Holy Spirit on earth and drawing his resources from Christ in heaven. What was so blessedly set forth in Stephen is still God’s thought for His people today, and seeing that Christ is in the glory and the Holy Spirit is yet on earth, it is still possible to answer to the mind of God.

FIVE

Moreover, the Word of God not only presents the realization of these two great facts in the case of an individual believer, but we are permitted to see companies of saints governed and characterized by these facts. In Acts 9:31 we read, "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, were multiplied." Here we have Christian assemblies marked by two things: they walked in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit. Opposed and persecuted by the religious world of the day, they were directed and supported by the Lord in glory and guided by the Holy Spirit on earth. Not many wise after the flesh, nor many mighty or noble were found in these assemblies. For the most part those who formed these companies were drawn from the foolish, the weak and the base of this world, who like Peter and John were unlearned and ignorant men. And yet in the sight of the Lord they were the excellent of the earth in whom He finds His delight and with whom the Holy Spirit is content to dwell. Without worldly wealth, without humanly devised creed or articles of religion, without visible head or guide, with nothing indeed that appealed to sight or which nature could appreciate or in which flesh could boast, they pursued their pilgrim way as the ransomed of the Lord, with songs and everlasting joy, for they were on their way to the city which has foundations in company with the Lord in glory and the Holy Spirit on earth.

Without Christ and the Holy Spirit they had nothing, for earth was closed behind them, but with Christ and the Spirit they had everything, for heaven was opened before them. Little wonder that they enjoyed rest and edification, comfort and multiplication. How far, alas, has Christendom travelled from this simple and beautiful picture. The assemblies have not held the Head in heaven and have ignored the Holy Spirit on earth. As a result there is among the people of God unrest and starvation, distress and disintegration. Yet Christ in the glory remains the same yesterday, today and forever, and the Holy Spirit abides with us forever. There is no change in Divine Persons. If then, in separation from corruptions of Christendom, even a few will yet look to Christ in heaven as their only resource and submit to the control of the Holy Spirit on earth, will they not in the end of the Church’s history find, even as at the beginning, some measure of rest, edification, comfort and multiplication?

SIX The consideration of the history of Stephen and the early assemblies brings before us the further great fact that Christianity sets our feet in a path which demands, at every step, the exercise of faith. In this respect Christianity is in direct contrast to Judaism. The Jewish system was designedly of a national and earthly order. Everything in that system — the temple with the costly stones, the priests with their beautiful robes, the singers with their instruments, the altars with their sacrifices — appealed to sight and sense. Its laws and precepts regulated every detail of the present natural life, but it was silent as to heaven, the life to come and things unseen. That there existed great men of faith in connection with that system is beyond question, but the system itself demanded obedience from the natural man rather than faith from one born again. In Christianity, while of necessity it will greatly influence the life here, we are at once brought into relation with heaven and the unseen, and above all, with Divine Persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Here at once faith is a necessity since only by faith can we know the Father, see Jesus crowned with glory and honour, or realize the presence of the Holy Spirit on earth.

Yet if we look at Christendom today, we are at once faced with the solemn fact that it has turned back to a Jewish order of things, marked by everything that appeals to sight and sense, with very

little that calls for the exercise of faith. In result the great distinguishing truths of Christianity are entirely lost. Christ in the glory as the risen and exalted Head of the Church is set aside by human appointed heads, and the presence of the Holy Spirit on earth is almost entirely ignored.

If, however, Christ in the glory and the Holy Spirit on earth are ignored, it must inevitably lead to the loss of all true understanding of that great mystery — Christ and the Church — and of the heavenly calling and the purpose of God, with the result that true Christians will not rise beyond preaching the gospel to meet the need of man, while the great mass of mere professors prepare the way for the great apostasy.

SEVEN

If, however, through the mercy of God the eyes of a few have been opened to see the distinguishing truths of Christianity and the great departure from these great truths in Christendom, what are such to do? Are they to remain in ecclesiastical systems which by their constitution or practice set aside the Headship of Christ and the presence of the Spirit? Does Scripture afford any light as to the course those should take whose eyes have been opened to these great truths and who desire to answer to them?

It is impossible to think that God has left His people without any guidance for an evil day. We read in 2 Timothy 3:16-17,

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." So we may be sure there is light to show the path of the godly in an evil day. Through ignorance or bad teaching we may fail to discern it. We may be so wedded to national and hereditary systems of men that we even oppose it. We may through indifference and lack of exercise fail to walk in it. Nevertheless God has a highway through this wilderness-world for the ransomed of the Lord, and He has given light that we may discern this way in a day of ruin. This light is not confined to one scripture. The Second Epistle to Timothy, the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, the Second Epistle of Peter, the Epistles of John and of Jude, the addresses to the seven churches of Revelation 2:1-29 and Revelation 3:1-22, all have in view the ruin of the Church in responsibility and in a special way give light for the Christian path in the last days. Moreover we have in the Epistle to the Hebrews very special light for those who find themselves linked up with religious systems formed after the pattern of Judaism. That Epistle was written to Jewish believers who were in danger of turning back from Christianity to Judaism. To meet this danger, Christ is presented to their hearts. The glory of His person, the glory of the place He holds at the right hand of God, the grace and sympathy of His heart as our great High Priest, and the efficacy of His work, all pass before us to attract our hearts and thus draw us outside of every religious system on earth and attach our hearts to Himself in heaven. Hence, the great closing exhortation of the Epistle, "Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach" (Hebrews 13:13)! One great aim of the Epistle is to show that if Christ appears before the face of God in heaven, He takes a place outside the religious systems of men on earth. If He has gone within the veil He has also gone without the Camp. So the exhortation to the believer is to go without the Camp to reach the company of Christ in the outside place.

Here then is the Scriptural reason and the Scriptural warrant for leaving the religious systems of men. We do so, not simply because there is a great deal of evil in these systems, but because Christ is outside of these systems and we desire to reach Him and give Him His place. We "go forth . . . unto Him."

EIGHT The question, however, may arise, What is signified by "the Camp" and how can this term cover in its significance the religious systems of Christendom so as to warrant us leaving them?

First, let us note that whatever the significance of the Camp it is something of which it is said that Christ is outside. Three times in the three verses of Hebrews 13:11-13 we have the word "without." In Hebrews 11:11 it is used in connection with the type, in Hebrews 11:12 in connection with the great antitype and in Hebrews 13:13 in its application to believers.

Under the law, the body of the sacrifice (sin offering) was burned without the Camp. In the Antitype, Jesus, that He might set apart His people from everything inconsistent with the holiness of God, suffered the judgment of sins in the place of forsaking. But to accomplish this great work He went outside the worldly religious system (Judaism) which in its beginning had been sanctioned by God, but in its history had become corrupted by man. This system is set before us under the figure of a Camp or a City; both figures presenting the same idea of an ordered religious system adapted to the natural man, but in different circumstances — in movement at one time and settled at another. But what, more precisely, is the Camp? The Camp represents a worldly religious system, originally set up of God, making its appeal to the natural man and composed of people outwardly in relationship with God. Turning to Hebrews 9:1-10 we find a description of the Camp.

1. It was marked by a worldly sanctuary with magnificent vessels and furniture (Hebrews 9:1-2).

2. There was an inner shrine to this worldly sanctuary, veiled from the outer and known as "the Holiest of all" (Hebrews 9:3-4).

3. In connection with this worldly sanctuary there existed an order of priests, distinct from the people, who devoted themselves to the service of the sanctuary and over whom there was a High Priest (Hebrews 9:6-7)

4. There were the people (Hebrews 9:7) distinct from the priests and who had no direct part in the service of the sanctuary.

5. The system, as such, signified (while it lasted) that there was no direct access to God (Hebrews 9:8).

6. This worldly sanctuary with its priests and sacrifices, could not give a purged conscience.

7. There is one significant omission. There is no thought of any reproach connected with this worldly religious system.

Such is the description of the Camp in its significant features as presented in the Word of God. But the Word also presents Christianity in all its beauty as the exact contrast to the Camp. The Christian Company is composed of a people, not in mere outward relationship with God by natural birth, but in vital relationship by new birth. Instead of outward worship in magnificent buildings it

introduces living worship in "spirit and truth." In place of a special class of priests distinct from the laity, all believers are priests with Christ their great High Priest. Moreover, Christianity carries with it the blessing of a purged conscience and direct access to God. Moreover, since it opens heaven to the simplest believer, it entails on earth the reproach of Christ.

Having before us the characteristic differences between the Jewish "camp" and the Christian company, we may easily test the great religious systems of men. Do these great universal, national or non-conformist systems of men bear the characteristics of the Camp or those of Christianity? Sadly, beyond all question, truth compels us to admit that they are framed after the pattern of the Camp. They have adopted a worldly sanctuary with its railed-off inner shrine; they have ordained a special class of priests under the direction of a supreme priest who stands between God and the people, with the result that these systems, as such, give no direct access to God and no purged conscience. These systems recognize man in the flesh, appeal to man in the flesh and are so constituted as to embrace man in the flesh. Hence with them, there is no reproach. Are then such systems the Camp? Strictly they are not. In one sense they are worse than the Camp inasmuch as they are merely imitations framed after the pattern of the Camp, with certain Christian adjuncts. The Camp was in its inception set up by God, but these great systems have been originated by men, however sincere and pious they may have been. Hence if the exhortation to the Jewish believers was to go forth without the Camp, how much more incumbent it is upon the believer today to go forth outside that which is merely an imitation of the Camp.

NINE

Here then we have our warrant for going outside the great religious systems of men, but let us remember we do so in order to come under the direction of Christ in glory and the control of the Holy Spirit on earth. We have had our eyes opened to see that it is impossible to remain in these systems and give Christ His place or the Holy Spirit His place. As to our actual histories, a variety of reasons may have swayed us in leaving these systems. But it is of the first importance to see that the true Scriptural motive for leaving these systems is to "go forth unto Him." Going forth from that which we have learned to be evil is merely negative. No one can live on negatives. Going forth unto Christ is positive. It will indeed involve separation from much that is evil, but it is above all separation to Christ — a separation that gives us a positive Object for the heart. If we are moved by any less motive we shall be in danger of going back and building again the things we have destroyed. Those who go forth lightly can go back lightly, but the soul actuated by true motives goes forth from the Camp-order of religion to come under the sway of Christ and the Spirit. This outside place with Christ is one of great privilege and corresponding responsibility. Of privilege, for what can be more blessed than coming into the company of the risen Christ and under the control of the Spirit? Of responsibility, for the company of Christ and the Spirit will demand the exclusion of all evil — moral doctrinal, ecclesiastical — inconsistent with the presence of Divine Persons. To come into this place is very different from merely leaving a sect because it has bad doctrine or bad practice or bad ecclesiastical procedure, such as one-man ministry. We may indeed separate from some system and come together in somewhat more Scriptural fashion, meeting simply as believers and refusing one-man ministry, and yet fall short of coming to Christ and giving the Spirit His place; and in result only make one more sect which opens the door to a great deal of self-will through any-man ministry.

Moreover, this outside place with Christ is not only a place of privilege and responsibility, but one of reproach. In the verses we have considered (Hebrews 13:2-13) the outside place is viewed in two ways; first, as the place of judgment and second, as the place of reproach. In marvellous grace, Christ went outside the gate bearing both the judgment of God against men and the reproach of men against God. He could say, "The reproaches of them who reproached Thee are fallen upon Me" (Psalms 69:9). None except Christ could bear the judgment of God, but others can share in the reproaches of men. Thus, while Christ has gone without the gate bearing our sins, we are called to go without the gate bearing His reproach. If the grace of God has associated us with the glory of Christ in heaven, it gives us also the high privilege of sharing the reproach of Christ on earth. The riches of Christ in heaven entail the reproach of Christ on earth. The Jewish system gave man a great place on earth but no place in heaven. Christianity gives the believer a blessed place in heaven, but no place on earth except one of reproach.

Yet if once we realize that we are in the company of Christ and the Holy Spirit, we shall esteem "the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt." What is more blessed or more wonderful than a company of people on their way to glory in company with the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit? Such people indeed may be poor and feeble in themselves, with no human creed to maintain sound doctrine, no articles of religion to maintain order, no ritual or ceremonial rites to conduct their assembly meetings or their service for the Lord. However, having Christ in the glory as their Head and the Holy Spirit on earth to control, they will have more than all the systems that pious men have ever devised because they will have all the vast resources of the Godhead at their disposal, for in Christ all the fulness of the Godhead is pleased to dwell. How great then the encouragement to our feeble faith to act upon the exhortation, "Let us go forth unto Him."

TEN

It may be that only a few have faith to obey the exhortation. Those who do will find themselves not only in a place of great blessing, but in a place where so much that is according to God’s Word, can be carried out quite simply — things which would only be possible in a limited way to those who remain in the Camp. This is strikingly indicated by the writer of Hebrews, in the verses that follow in Hebrews 13:1-25.

1. For those in the outside place it is comparatively simple to wear the pilgrim character, as the writer says, "Here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come" (Hebrews 13:14).

2. Such who are set free from the restraints of man’s systems, can worship in spirit and in truth. We are thus exhorted "to offer the sacrifice of praise continually, that is the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His Name" (Hebrews 13:15).

3. Those in this outside place will not be indifferent to the needs of the bodies of men (Hebrews 9:16).

4. They will also care for souls, as we read "They watch for your souls" (Hebrews 13:17).

5. Set free from the hampering ritual of men they will be able to draw near to God in prayer (Hebrews 13:18).

6. They will be in a place where it is possible to do the will of God (Hebrews 13:21).

7. They will be in a place where it is possible to be well pleasing in His sight (Hebrews 13:21).

ELEVEN

Seeing then the path that is opened to us by Scripture, and seeing something of the blessedness of this path, may we have grace and faith to leave all that is of man and enter upon the highway that has been cast up for the ransomed of the Lord. However great our individual failure, however great the ruin of the Church in its responsibility, these two tremendous facts still abide. Christ is still a Man in the glory at the right hand of God and the Holy Spirit is yet on earth, and thus it is still possible to answer to the exhortation "Let us go forth unto Him." With these two stupendous facts the Church was formed and commenced its pilgrim way: with these two facts it has been maintained throughout the long ages, and with these two facts it will also at last close its earthly journey, for before God closes His Book we have one last view of the Church on earth as the waiting Bride, led by the Spirit on earth and listening to Jesus in the glory (Revelation 22:16-17). In the course of its journey through this scene, how greatly these facts have been obscured! How much has been adopted that is wholly inconsistent with them, but at the last the Church, stripped of every human resource, every religious device and all worldly aids, will pass into glory in the power of the two great facts that Jesus is in the glory, and the Holy Spirit present with the Church on earth.

Great indeed has been the failure and small indeed has been the appreciation of the vast resources involved in these truths. Yet because Jesus remains in the glory, the same yesterday, today and forever, because the Holy Spirit abides with the Church forever, the ransomed of the Lord will at last come to the heavenly city with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads. There they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Section 2 In The Last Days — Philadelphia and Laodicea

Introduction In the first part of this Section the Scriptures are simply allowed to speak in relation to the way in which Christ is presented to the assembly in the Asian provincial city of Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7-13). The attitude of approval which the Lord takes towards Philadelphia, expressed in His own gracious words, as well as His word of warning to them and His word of encouragement to the overcomer, are full of instruction for each of us today. In the second part of this Section, we are shown the Lord’s presentation of Himself to the assembly in the Asian city of Laodicea (Revelation 3:14-19). The Lord first exposes the Laodiceans with strong words of disapproval, then counsels them, deals with them, shows His grace to them, and finally gives a word to the overcomer. By studying the Lord’s addresses to the seven assemblies of the Roman province of Asia in Revelation 2:1-29 and Revelation 3:1-22, and particularly the addresses to Philadelphia and Laodicea as presented in this Section, we are able to discern assembly conduct which brings both the Lord’s strongest approval and strongest disapproval. Consequently, we as individual believers are able to better judge whether or not our "church" position and attitudes meet with the Lord’s approval by being Philadelphian in character, or whether we have drifted towards Laodicean walk, influence and attitude (Ed.). In The Last Days Part 1 Philadelphia — Revelation 3:7-13 The addresses to the assemblies in Revelation 2:1-29 and Revelation 3:1-22 were sent to seven assemblies actually existing in the Roman province of Asia in the days of the Apostle John. Bearing in mind, however, that in the introduction to Revelation, the whole book is referred to as "prophecy," it becomes evident that these addresses have a prophetic character. Evidently, the

Spirit of God has taken occasion by the conditions existing in these assemblies to portray the consecutive history of the Church from beginning to end, viewed as the responsible witness for Christ on the earth during the time of His absence.

Ephesus represented the condition of the Church, under the eye of Christ, at the beginning. Then there came a time when that phase in the Church's history passed away and was succeeded by Smyrna which in turn, characterized the whole Church. Smyrna was succeeded by Pergamos, and finally Pergamos was succeeded by Thyatira. It is, however, important to see that Thyatira is not succeeded by any other assembly. The fact of the Lord's coming being mentioned in Thyatira shows that this phase of the Church's history continues to the end. It is the last of the successive assemblies; that is to say, it is the last assembly that is viewed as holding an ecclesiastical position representative of the whole Church. The last three assemblies are not viewed in this way. So, we may say the beginning of the Church's history in responsibility is presented in Ephesus and the end is reached in Thyatira; the last three assemblies presenting particular phases of the end.

Thyatira assumes an ecclesiastical position and is marked by the grossest corruption. Sardis represents a movement in which there is the correction of abuses, but which leads to lifeless formalism. Laodicea represents a still later movement marked by indifference to Christ and self-sufficiency.

Confining now our thoughts to Philadelphia, we are at once faced with the notable fact that in spite of the last days being marked by the corruption of Rome, the lifeless formality of Protestantism, and the indifference and self-sufficiency of Modernism, there will be found upon the earth those who have the approval of the Lord.

We do well to remember that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,"; at the same time there are certain portions which give the people of God positive instruction, in the mind of the Lord, for the last days. Of these Scriptures, the Second Epistle of Timothy and the address to Philadelphia have a pre-eminent place. In Second Timothy the Apostle Paul gives us definite instructions how to act when the House of God has become likened to a great house in which there are vessels to honour and to dishonour. Apparently, however, it was not revealed to Paul that in the last days of the Church's history there would be a Church revival. This great fact was revealed to the Apostle John in the address to Philadelphia, wherein we have clearly set forth a special movement of the Spirit of God, in the end of the Church's history, bringing about a Church revival which has the Lord's approval and therefore is according to His mind.

Having then the instruction of Second Timothy and the addresses to the seven assemblies, it is possible for us to know exactly what the Lord condemns and, of yet greater importance, to know by the address to Philadelphia, what the Lord approves in these last days. Hence, however great the confusion of Christendom, there can be no excuse for the people of God to drift in aimless confusion, groping for light "amidst the encircling gloom," each seeking to find his way as best he can, without any certainty as to the mind of the Lord. Alas! as the result of listening to the many voices of men, this confused state of mind is only too common. If, however, we have an ear to hear what the Spirit saith to the churches, we shall learn what is according to the mind of the Lord. Then knowing His mind, the one who loves the Lord will seek to answer to His mind without assuming to have done so.

It is then of the first importance to see the true character of the Church revival in Philadelphia. It is not a revival of the Church in its ecclesiastical position: it is a revival of the Church morally. Thyatira represents the Church ecclesiastically, but with almost every moral trait of the Church lacking, and hence, in the eye of Christ, is utterly corrupt. Philadelphia, on the other hand, assumes no ecclesiastical position, but is marked by the great moral characteristics of the Church, and hence has the approval of Christ. This by no means infers that those who are right morally are indifferent to corporate or assembly responsibility. Such will indeed be jealous of every Church principle, while refusing the assumption of being the Church. In Philadelphia there is no attempt to reform that which has become corrupt in Thyatira, nor to revive that which has become lifeless in Sardis, but there is a return to the great spiritual features of the Church as in the beginning. In this sense, Philadelphia represents a Church revival.

What then, we may enquire, are the great spiritual features of the Church? This raises another important question: For what purpose was the Church left on earth? There is surely only one answer. It was left here to witness for Christ during the time of His absence. It is God's great thought that, though Christ has been rejected and has gone from earth to heaven, yet there should be a company of people left behind on earth in whom the character of Christ should be continued so that, though Christ is personally gone, He should still be seen in His people.

Now the whole value of the Philadelphian assembly lies in this fact that, in the end of the Church's history, they express something of the character, the path and the strangership of Christ, and thus return to the spiritual features of the Church as at the beginning. They take their character from the One who is the Holy and the True; a door is set before them that no man can shut; they move in circumstances of outward weakness; they keep Christ's Word; they do not deny His Name; they are opposed by those who claim an hereditary and official religious position; they are loved by Christ; they keep the word of His patience and thus wear a stranger's and pilgrim character while waiting for His coming in glory.

What, however, is all this but Christ — His character and path of strangership — reproduced in His people? God is the Holy and the True, and Christ was in this world, the perfect expression of all that God is, in circumstances that were ever marked by outward weakness. The manger and the inn, the lonely path, the upper room, the cross and the borrowed grave, all speak of the outward weakness in which the Son of God passed through the world. He also met the constant opposition of those who claimed to be the hereditary people of God. But in spite of every circumstance of weakness and in the face of all opposition, to Him the porter opened a door which no man could shut. They sought to cast Him down from the brow of the hill, they took up stones to cast at Him, they sought to entangle Him in His talk, and they took counsel to destroy Him, but all in vain. God had opened a door that men and demons combined could not shut. In circumstances of weakness and in the presence of continued opposition, He perfectly expressed all that God is as the Holy and the True; He kept the Father's word, declared the Father's Name and received the Father's approval. In the midst of the ruin of the Jewish dispensation, the Father could look down upon Him and say, "This is My beloved Son in whom is My delight." He refused to interfere in the course of this world — it was the hour of His patience and no one took His crown, for He passed from the place of weakness to the place of power at the right hand of God where faith delights to see Him crowned with glory and honour.

Such was the path of Christ on earth. We repeat the whole value of Philadelphia lies in the fact that, in the midst of the ruin of Christendom, God can look down and see something of the character of Christ displayed in a little remnant, and therein a return to His original intention in the Church. This meets with the unqualified approval of the Lord.

Earnestly desiring to answer to that which meets with His approval, we may well enquire: How was the condition that the Lord approves in Philadelphia brought about? For whatever brought about a return to the spiritual features of the assembly in their case can accomplish a like result in the Lord's people today. Is not the return to the Church morally entirely brought about by the appreciation of Christ in the way that He presents Himself to the Philadelphians? This brings us to the consideration of: The Way in which Christ is Presented to the Church in Philadelphia

Christ is seen in a three-fold way: first as "the Holy," then as "the True" and lastly as "he who hath the key of David." It is clear that Christ is not presented to this assembly in His official character as holding the seven stars and walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. He is presented in His moral glories.

He is "the Holy" — the One Who is free from all taint of sin and wholly separate from sinners. Personally, He was ever so, but at the cross He vicariously stood in our place, was made sin, and as such was forsaken of God, for God is holy. But He is risen, the sins are gone, the man who committed the sins is judged and legally removed from the eye of God, and as the risen Christ He is "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners and made higher than the heavens." In the prayer of John 17:1-26 we learn the two great ways in which practical holiness is brought about in the saints. First, it is by the cleansing power of the Word, for the Lord can say, "Sanctify them through Thy truth, Thy Word is truth." Then it is by having Christ Himself before us as an object in the glory, as He says, "For their sakes I sanctify Myself that they also might be sanctified through the truth." The Word searches our thoughts and words and ways, leading to the condemnation of all that is of the flesh. Further, it reveals to us Christ in the glory, the perfect pattern of a holiness that is according to God. As we behold the glory of the Lord we become changed into the same image from glory to glory. He is apart from all evil and separate from sinners, and we too, if we call upon the Name of the Lord, are responsible not only to depart from iniquity, but to separate from those who go on with iniquity. We must purge ourselves from the vessels to dishonour (2 Timothy 2:19-21). There can be no holiness without separation from evil and from those who hold the evil.

Then Christ is "the True." All that He is, He is in perfection. All that He does and all that He says is in absolute perfection. He is nothing partially; He is everything perfectly. If He is the Light, He is "the true Light." If He is the Bread come down from heaven, He is the "true Bread." If He is the Vine, He is the "true Vine." If He is the Witness, He is the "true Witness." Does He bear record of Himself? His "record is true." Does He pass judgment? His "judgment is true." Correspondence to Christ as"the Holy" will demand separation from all the corruptions of the flesh which find their greatest expression in Thyatira; the appreciation of Christ as "the True" will deliver from the lifeless formalism and unreality of Sardis.

Furthermore, the Lord has "the key of David." Keys are not directly connected with the Church and its administration, but with the Kingdom and government (Matthew 16:19). The quotation is taken from Isaiah 22:22, and the context of the passage connects the idea of government with the key, for in the preceding verse the Lord says, "I will commit thy government into His hand." The two

great symbols of government in Scripture are the sword and the key. The sword implies the exercise of government in the judgment of evil; the key implies the exercise of government in restraining evil or in opening a door for blessing. The day is coming when the Lord will use the sword in overwhelming judgment. Today, He uses the key on behalf of His people to make a way for what is of Himself and to restrain that which opposes Himself. How blessed to apprehend Christ as "the Holy" and "the True" and as the One Who holds the key and can thus maintain His people in testimony for Himself in spite of all the power of evil. The answer to this presentation of Christ results in: The Expression of His Character and The Support of His Power This is very blessedly seen in the assembly of Philadelphia. In addressing this assembly there are four things of which the Lord can say with unqualified approval "Thou hast."

First, The Lord can say, "Thou hast a little strength." There is no display of power before the world in Philadelphia. The world cannot appreciate Spiritual power, and Philadelphia does not possess the power that would secure them a place in this world. They hold no ecclesiastical office; they wield no political power; they draw upon no worldly resources; they have no authority in the councils of men. They meet in no sumptuous buildings, they have no ornate ritual. They possess nothing that would make any show before men or give them a place in the eyes of the world. In this respect there is a return to the condition of the Church at the beginning.

Second, the Lord can say of Philadelphia, " Thou has kept My Word." Christ’s Word is the absolute expression of Himself. In reply to the Jews’ question, "Who art Thou?", He can say, "Altogether that which I also say to you" (John 8:25, JND). His Word expresses His mind. To "keep" His Word is more than having it or assenting to it; it implies that His Word is treasured and governs the life. In a day when Christ’s words are belittled, and man’s small mind (expressed by his feeble words) made much of, it is no small thing in the eyes of the Lord that a few, getting back to Him Who is from the beginning, order their whole pathway according to the mind of Christ, expressed in the Word of Christ and learned in the company of Christ.

Third, the Lord can say of Philadelphia, "Thou hast not denied My Name." If His words express His mind, His Name expresses all that is set forth in Him. If His Name is called Jesus it declares that He is the Saviour. If His Name is Emmanuel, it is that God is set forth in Him. Corrupt Christendom is not only indifferent to His Word, but adds to its sin by denying His Name. His deity is more and more widely denied; He is in effect refused as Saviour and virtually rejected as Lord by those who profess His Name. Once again He is wounded in the house of His friends. Nevertheless, there is found a remnant, represented by Philadelphia, who do not deny His Name and thus make a stand against the corrupt mass that drifts on to the great apostasy.

Fourth, the Lord can say, "Thou hast kept the word of My patience." His patience is the patient waiting for the moment when He will assert His rights and come forth as King of kings and Lord of lords. In the meantime it involves the refusal to interfere in the course of this world. If we keep the word of His patience, we shall accept the place of stranger ship with a rejected Christ and refuse to assert our rights in regard to this world. We shall take no voluntary part in political rule, in parochial administration or in the social ordering of the world. Such is the attitude of Philadelphians towards the world. They refuse to reign where Christ is rejected. The reigning time is not yet.

Thus in Philadelphia we have a return to the great spiritual features of the Church as at the beginning. In that lovely picture in the opening chapters of the Acts, we see the Church mainly

composed of the poor of this world possessing little of its wealth, and using what little they had only for the Lord, holding none of the religious offices and without social or political power. They were people indeed with little strength, but very precious in the eyes of the Lord, for they kept His Word, did not deny His Name and kept the word of His patience.

Here then we have a Philadelphian remnant that return to the Church's right relations to Christ, and consequently to its right attitude to the world. The result that flows from this is of the very deepest importance. In getting back to the right relations of the Church to Christ:

They Learn the True and Unchanging Attitude of Christ to the Church This brings us at once to the consideration of what Christ is to the Church. How beautifully it comes before us in the Lord's own gracious words:

· I know thy works.

· I have set before thee an open door.

· I will make them to come and worship before thy feet.

· I have loved thee.

· I also will keep thee.

· I come quickly.

· Him that overcometh will I make a pillar.

First, the Lord can say, "I know thy works." Philadelphia possesses no great works that the world can appreciate or that would give them a place of pre-eminence in the religious world. They do not seek to publish moving reports of evangelical campaigns or assembly progress, nor to compile records of devoted lives. They do not seek the approval of men but the approval of the Lord. It is enough for them that the Lord has taken account of their works. They rest in the fact that He has said, "I know thy works."

Second, the Lord can say, "I have set before thee an open door." Philadelphia realizes the power of the Lord exercised on behalf of the Church in setting before it an open door that no man can shut. Thus it was in the beginning. Without human influence, human organization or human learning, the testimony of the Church was sustained in the presence of a hostile world. The Lord "opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles" (Acts 14:27) and no man could shut it. Again the Apostle can say "a great door and effectual is opened unto me and there are many adversaries" (1 Corinthians 16:9). The testimony of one man could not be silenced by many adversaries if the Lord opened a door for that man.

Third, the Lord in dealing with those who oppose can say, "I will make them of the synagogue of Satan," and again, "I will make them to come and worship before thy feet." Philadelphia thus realizes the subduing power of the Lord in dealing with opposition to His Church. There are those who "say they are Jews and are not, but do lie." Such hold an official religious position before the world and profess to be the people of God on the ground of a hereditary religion based upon tradition which appeals to the natural man. Such will always be in deadly opposition to those who return to the spiritual features of the Church. But the Lord can subdue such as far as He sees fit.

He can expose their true character, for He says, "I will make them of the synagogue of Satan." In spite of their religious pretension they will be manifested to be only a Satanic imitation of the Jewish system. On the other hand, the Lord will make them acknowledge what is according to Himself. "I will make them to come and worship before thy feet." Thus Philadelphia realizes not only the support of the Lord in opening doors, but also the subduing power of the Lord in dealing with opposition.

Fourth, with great delight the Lord can say, "I have loved thee." Philadelphia realizes the Lord's love to the Church. It is the opposers who draw forth this expression of the Lord's love. Such will have to learn what the Philadelphians already knew, that Christ loves His Church. The departure of the Church from the place of witness to Christ arose from leaving "first love" to Christ. This meant that the consciousness of Christ's love to the Church was lost. In Philadelphia there is a return to the sense of Christ's love to the Church and hence a revival of love to the Lord.

Fifth, those whom Christ loves He will surely keep. Hence the Lord can say, "I also will keep thee out of the hour of trial which is about to come upon the whole habitable world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." Having returned to the truth of the Church, Philadelphia has no delusion as to the course of this world. Philadelphia knows full well that all the desperate efforts of men to bring about universal peace, relieve poverty and improve social conditions, will entirely fail. In spite of alliances, conferences, leagues and treaties, there fast approaches an hour of unprecedented trial for those who dwell upon the earth, when before the rising tide of revolutionary passions, governments will be overturned, treaties will be torn up, alliances will be broken and the whole edifice of society will fall to ruin. But Philadelphia knows that the Church will be kept out of the terror and confusion of this hour of trial, by being caught away to meet the Lord in the air.

Sixth, the Lord encourages Philadelphia with His arresting words, "I come quickly." The hour of patience will give place to the day of glory when Christ will come forth in power and glory and display His Church all glorious, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. Philadelphia is in the secret of this blessed hope which ends the path of suffering and leads to an eternity of blessing.

Seventh, when Christ comes, His reward will be with Him. The Philadelphian seeks no power and fills no place of prominence in this world, but of the overcomer the Lord can say, "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of My God."

Such is the attitude that the Lord takes toward Philadelphia. It is, however, important to remember that it represents the Lord's true and unchanging attitude towards the whole Church. It is not simply His attitude toward a Philadelphian company. It is true they alone may realize it, but what they realize is true for the whole Church. The Church may have changed and grievously departed from her right attitude to Christ, but Christ is the same and His attitude to His Church has never changed. He still knows all that is of Himself, He still supports His Church, He still subdues those who oppose His Church, He still loves His Church, and He will preserve her from the trial that is coming upon the earth. He is coming for His Church and at the last will display the Church in glory, in company with Himself.

Thus, in the assembly of Philadelphia we have a company of people under the eye of the Lord who, in the midst of the ruin of the Church, return to the true attitude of the Church to Christ and learn the true and unchanging attitude of Christ to the Church. Moreover, being in right relations

with Christ, they are a company of people who are in right relations with all those who are Christ’s, for the very name Philadelphia means, "love of the brethren." Thus they walk in obedience to the "new commandment" given to the disciples in the Lord’s last discourse, "that ye love one another" (John 13:34). Again as the Lord unfolds before His disciples the lovely picture of the new Christian company in John 15:9-17, He twice repeats His command "that ye love one another" (John 15:12, John 15:17). No breakdown of the Church in responsibility can for one moment set aside the Lord’s new command given "in the beginning": it abides to the end. It is significant that the Lord’s description of the new company opens with the assertion of His great love for His own (John 15:9). It is only as we abide in the sense of the Lord’s love to all His own that we shall be constrained to love all that are His. It must be remembered that Philadelphia does not mean "love of the Philadelphians," but love of the brethren. Sadly, many may be found in religious systems from which we are bound to separate, if we are determined to keep His Word and not deny His Name; nevertheless, "love of the brethren" will lead out one’s affections to all who are "His brethren." In spite of all barriers, love will find some outlet for practical expression while maintaining all that is due to holiness, for divine love will always be linked with divine holiness. For such, the Lord has: No Word of Reproof, But He Has A Word of Warning

"Hold that fast which thou hast, that no one take thy crown." It is not simply "a crown" that they are in danger of losing, but "thy crown" — their own distinguishing crown. The distinction of the Philadelphians is that they cherish the truths concerning Christ and the Church in a day when on every hand, these truths are denied. Having returned to the apprehension and practice of the truths concerning Christ and the Church, their ever present danger is that they may surrender these truths and be drawn aside into the surrounding corruption, unreality and self-sufficiency of Christendom. Hence the exhortation is "Hold fast." Every effort of Satan will be made to lead the Philadelphian to give up what has been so blessedly revived to him. The enemy will gladly plead the help of saints and the need of sinners if, by so doing, he can get the Philadelphian to abandon what he has. He will argue that there are a few saints in Sardis who have not defiled their garments, and that there are needy sinners in Laodicea who are poor and blind and naked. He will say to go into Sardis to help those saints; go into Laodicea to reach those sinners! But to go back under any plea to that which the Lord condemns, is to abandon that which the Lord approves. All the seductions of the enemy are met by the Lord’s warning words, "Hold fast." If the Philadelphian "holds fast," the Lord will doubtless open doors to help His people wherever they may be and to meet the need of sinners wherever found. Does not the very exhortation to "hold fast" indicate that times of revival may be followed by times of declension in which many may drift and lose their crown? Blessed indeed to be a Philadelphian, but Philadelphia is no haven of refuge where saints can settle down, but rather a company blessed with the approval of Christ, and for this reason the special object of the enemy’s attacks: hence the constant need to contend for the faith, and "hold fast" that which has been received. The word of warning is followed by: A Word of Encouragement to the Overcomer The question may arise, If the Lord has nothing to condemn in Philadelphia, what is there to overcome? The reference to the synagogue of Satan and the exhortation to "hold fast" will dispose of this difficulty. The overcomer is evidently one who overcomes every effort of the enemy to induce him to surrender the truth revived and to move him from the place of separation that the truth demands. In a word, the overcomer is one who "holds fast." Such an one will have a very blessed reward. He will not only form part of the temple — the Church in glory — but he will be a pillar in the temple. On earth, such had no place of honour or power in the religious

world, but in glory he will have a place both of honour and power. At last he will find a haven of rest, for "he shall go no more out." The Lord will make such a three-fold witness that all can read. The Lord can say, "I will write upon him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, new Jerusalem . . . and My new Name." He will be the witness in glory to God made known in Christ; to the Church of God in perfection as the New Jerusalem; and lastly the witness to Christ for all eternity in connection with the New Jerusalem, the new heavens, the new earth and all things new, for it will be Christ's new Name that will be written on the overcomer. The address closes with the appeal to the individual who has an ear to hear. "Let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." The Lord addresses the Church, and the Spirit applies in power the words of the Lord to the individual with the opened ear.

It may be said that the assembly in Philadelphia as presented in Revelation is extremely attractive, but where can we see it in actual existence today? Again, can any company say they are Philadelphians? We must remember even if we are unable with our limited vision to see anything that we could say answers to Philadelphia in an absolute way, nevertheless the Spirit of God has foretold that in the closing days of the Church's history, such will be found on the earth under the eye of the Lord, and what the Lord sees is everything, not what we see. Moreover, let us remember it is the Lord who says of the Philadelphians, "Thou hast a little strength, thou hast kept My Word and hast not denied My Name." It is not what the Philadelphians say of themselves. What the Lord says of His people is everything, not what they say of themselves.

We live in days when men are making great efforts to bring about the religious unity of Christendom. Thyatira with its corruption, Sardis with its dead formality and Laodicea with its indifference and self-sufficiency are seeking to enter into an alliance in which there will be everything to gratify the flesh and nothing that Christ can approve. In the presence of the activities of religious flesh it is an immense mercy to see how the Spirit of God is working and to know what has the approval of the Lord. The path of blessing for His people will be to follow where He leads and seek to answer to that which has His approval, ever remembering that those who approach nearest to Philadelphia will be the last to assume that they are Philadelphians. At the same time we must not forget that there may be as much pride with those who loudly protest that they are not Philadelphians as there is assumption with those who claim that they are. May we have grace to set our faces with all earnestness towards that which the Lord approves and leave Him to say how far we have answered to His mind.

Part 2 Laodicea Revelation 3:14-22 The address to the assembly in Laodicea presents the last phase in the history of the professing Church on earth. That this phase has been reached is made very manifest by the rise in recent years of a religious infidel movement passing under the name of Modernism, etc., marked by characteristics that exactly correspond to those so graphically depicted in this address. The great importance of the address to Laodicea is that therein we have a definite unfolding of the Lord's mind in regard to this last phase of Christendom, the attitude He takes toward it and the truth He would bring before it. The believer is thus warned against the condition which the Lord so severely condemns, and at the same time instructed how it is to be met.

It is noticeable that in the assembly in Philadelphia, the Lord has nothing to condemn, whereas, in the assembly in Laodicea there is nothing that He can approve. The earnest desire of every

true-hearted saint in these last days must be to answer to the condition that the Lord approves and to escape the condition that He condemns. It is however well to remember, that in ourselves there is no power for Philadelphian recovery or for escape from the Laodicean condition. The power, whether for recovery or escape, is in Christ. The appreciation of Christ as presented in Philadelphia is the power for recovery, just as the appreciation of Christ as presented in Laodicea is the way of escape.

First then we have: The Lord’s Presentation of Himself to Laodicea

Christ presents Himself in a threefold way as "the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God." It is noticeable in the address to Philadelphia, the Lord does not present Himself in His official character in connection with the Church, but rather in His moral glories. It is still more noticeable that in Laodicea, so low is their state, that the Lord does not present Himself in an aspect that properly belongs to the Church at all, but in an aspect that gives a very beautiful and complete presentation of Christ in connection with the present creation.

First, Christ is "the Amen." God has made exceedingly great and precious promises in connection with the present creation, and these promises will all have their fulfilment in Christ. That this is the meaning of the title Amen is clearly shown by 2 Corinthians 1:20. Speaking of the promises of God, the Apostle writes that "whatever promises of God there are, in Christ is the Yea, and in Christ the Amen" (JND). If God makes promises He will surely fulfil them. His promises are marked by certainty (Yea), and fulfilment (Amen). It is, however, Christ who secures certainty and fulfilment. He is the "Yea" and He is "the Amen." The promises are fulfilled in Him and by Him. But if every promise of blessing for the "world to come"* is fulfilled by Christ, then everything in the world to come* will be for the glory and exaltation of Christ. Alas, the Laodiceans exclude Christ and use the present scene for the exaltation of themselves. They stand condemned by Christ as the Amen.

{*i e., the Millennium, the thousand years’ reign of Christ.}

Second, Christ is "the faithful and true Witness." This creation is the sphere in which man has been placed in responsibility to witness for God. Adam, Noah, Israel, the Gentiles and the Church have at different seasons and in various ways, been set in responsibility to witness for God. Sadly, all have failed both in faithfulness to God and in witness before men. Adam disobeyed; Noah could not govern himself; Israel turned to idols and apostatized from Jehovah; the Gentiles abused the government committed to them; and the Church, leaving her first love, proved unfaithful to Christ and hence, lost her place of witness before men — the candlestick is removed. The last and most terrible stage of the Church’s failure is reached in Laodicea; a Church that, instead of faithfulness, is marked by indifference to Christ, and in place of witnessing to Christ actually bears witness to herself. This terrible condition is rebuked by the presentation of Christ as the One who passed through this world as "the faithful and true Witness." He alone was faithful to God and a true witness of God before man.

Third, Christ is "the beginning of the creation of God." He is not only the Amen, the One in whom every promise for this creation will be fulfilled, but He is also the beginning. He is the beginning as source inasmuch as the whole creation is derived from Him. He is also the beginning as the object of creation inasmuch as from the outset of creation, God had Christ in view. "All things were

created by Him and for Him." If everything derived from Him, it must be in order that everything should be for His glory. If He begins all and is the Object of all, it is that He may fill all.

Thus, every thought of God for this present creation centres in Christ. He is the beginning. He is the Amen and He is the faithful and true Witness. In the light of this presentation of Christ, the Laodiceans stand utterly condemned. The One who is "everything and in all" in God's thoughts, is outside the "church" of the Laodiceans. They are indifferent to the claims of Christ and filled with their own importance. Had the Laodiceans received the truth concerning Christ as the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the beginning of the creation of God, they never would have put Christ outside the door. They would have realized that they had everything in Christ and nothing without Him. Had they given heed to the epistle to the Colossians, which was to be read "in the church of the Laodiceans" (Colossians 4:16), it would have saved them, as indeed it would save religious professors today, from making everything of man and nothing of Christ. There they would have learned the glories of Christ in connections with all created things, and that Christ "is everything and in all." There, too, they would have learned that to give man in the flesh a place means the setting aside of Christ. To give heed to man's enticing words beguiles from the steadfastness of faith in Christ (Colossians 2:4-5). To be led away by the philosophy of men is to follow that which is "not after Christ" (Colossians 2:8). To pursue legal observances is to follow the shadow and lose the substance, which is Christ (Colossians 2:16-17). By being beguiled into superstition — intruding into things not seen — men are puffed up and cease to hold the Head, even Christ (Colossians 2:18-19). The Laodiceans had given no heed to the truth ministered through Paul in the epistle to the Colossians and hence came under the rebuke of the Lord ministered through John in the Revelation. The enticing words of men, philosophy and vain deceit after the traditions of men, had prevailed with the result that, in their sight, man was everything and Christ of no account. Their terrible condition is brought before us. The Lord's presentation of Himself is followed by: The Lord's Exposure of the Laodiceans

It is not until the Lord has presented Himself that He exposes the Laodiceans. Only as Christ is before us, can we justly estimate how serious has been the departure. The first and most terrible characteristic of the Laodiceans is indifference to Christ. As regards Christ they are neither "cold nor hot." They have neither the worldly infidel's hatred of Christ, nor the true Christian's jealous love for Christ. They see no beauty in His Person; they put no value upon His work. As regards the Person and work of Christ, in the "church" of the Laodiceans you may think what you like, hold what you like and say what you like. It is all a matter of indifference. In the sight of the Lord this indifference is fatal. To express His abhorrence of this deadly indifference to Himself, the Lord uses terms of loathing and contempt such as He never used of Thyatira with all its corruption, nor Sardis with all its dead formality. The fact that the Lord can say He will spew them out of His mouth, proves that He views them as professing Christians. He never speaks thus of the heathen. It is the profession of the Name of Christ to enrich and improve a man who is totally indifferent to Christ, that is so loathsome in the sight of Christ.

Second, the Laodicean is marked by self-occupation. "Thou sayest I am" this and I am that. If they are indifferent to Christ they are full of themselves. Instead of being a witness to Christ, the Church becomes a witness to herself.

Third, the Laodicean is marked by self-complacency. "Thou sayest I am rich," but, alas, the riches in which the Laodiceans boast are in themselves, not in Christ.

Fourth, the Laodicean is self-made. He says not only I am rich, but I am "increased with goods." The riches of the Laodiceans are the result of their own labours. They not only boast in their riches, but in the labours by which they have acquired them.

Fifth, the Laodicean is self-sufficient, for he says that he has need of nothing. They do not need Christ personally, for He is outside their church. They do not need His work, for they are satisfied with their own works. They need neither the Scriptures nor the Holy Spirit to unfold them. In Christ's estimation they need everything: in their own they need nothing.

Sixth, the Laodicean is ignorant of his true condition, for the Lord has to say, "Thou knowest not." Those who talk most of themselves know least about themselves. The man who is indifferent to Christ must be ignorant of himself, for it is only in the light of Christ that we learn our true condition. In the presence of the grace of God revealed in Christ, Peter says, "I am a sinful man." The most religious man who ever trod the earth discovered by one ray of light from Christ in the glory, that he was the chief of sinners. In His light we get light, and apart from that light all is darkness and ignorance.

Seventh, the Laodicean is unregenerate, for the Lord has to say, "thou art wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked." With all their boasted wealth, how wretched their condition, how miserable their plight if, while professing the Name of Christ, they are strangers to Christ. Such, alas, is their condition, for they are poor — they do not possess Christ or anything from Christ; they are blind — they see no beauty in Christ; they are naked — Christless and exposed to judgment.

Such is the terrible conditions of the Laodiceans. They may indeed have a prominent place in the eyes of the world, for they possess in large measure the riches that the world can appreciate, but in the eyes of the Lord they possess nothing of Christ except His Name. They are filled with themselves, self-occupied, self-complacent, self-made, self-sufficient, ignorant and unregenerate professors of Christianity.

It is notable that, until recently, commentators on the book of Revelation have had difficulty in finding any who exactly correspond to the Laodicean condition. They had to content themselves with pointing out that such would appear in the last stage of the Church's history. Today this difficulty no longer exists. A class of people has arisen under the term Modernism, etc., in whom is found, not only a particular feature of the Laodiceans but the exact correspondence to their terrible condition.

Modernism is characterized by total indifference to the glory and honour of Christ. His deity may be denied, His incarnation derided, His atoning work belittled, His resurrection rejected, but the Modernist is indifferent. Your belief or unbelief is of no consequence. If the virgin birth of Christ, the miracles of Christ, the sayings of Christ, do not appeal to your reason you are welcome to reject them — the Modernist is indifferent. But if the Modernist is indifferent to Christ he has much to say of himself, for he is not lacking in religious pretension and intellectual arrogance. According to his own estimate, he is rich in human ability and enjoys the monopoly of intellectual culture and ripe scholarship. He has grown rich through the accumulated stores of generations of laborious

research. Thus equipped with the wisdom of the ages, the Modernist undertakes to criticise Scripture with unbounded confidence. He assumes to know more about the Word of God than Christ and the Apostles. He pretends to have discovered the original sources of Scripture and presumes to tell us how much may be discarded as myth and how little we may safely retain as genuine. The self-sufficiency of the Modernist is such that he has need of nothing outside the scope of his own mental powers or beyond the reach of his own efforts. He has no need of the love of God that gave His only begotten Son; he has no need of Christ the great Mediator who gave Himself; he has no need of the sovereign work of the Spirit in new birth. While needing everything, in his own sight he has need of nothing. Such may possess all the wealth of Scholarship, but without Christ they are "poor." They may possess fine critical discernment, but failing to see beauty in Christ they are "blind." They may wrap themselves in a covering of intellectual pride, but without Christ they are naked and exposed to judgment.

Yet, Modernism exactly suits the last stage of corrupt Christendom. Its pernicious principles have worked their way into the "National Churches" and have been greedily accepted by many of the great nonconformist sects; they reign in many theological colleges and have invaded the missionary field; they are preached from innumerable pulpits, hold a prominent place in religious conferences and are applauded by the secular press.

We may well ask, How is this terrible evil to be met? The answer is found in: The Lord’s Counsel to the Laodiceans Not only does the Lord expose this last phase of Christendom in all its utter degradation, but in His marvellous grace He gives His counsel. If we would know what the Lord has to say to the Higher Critic, the Modernist, and every other form of religious infidelity, we must turn to the address to Laodicea.

First, the Lord counsels the Laodicean to buy from Himself. He can say "Buy of Me." The first great need of the Laodicean is to have a personal transaction with Christ. This surely is the thought of buying. We know that when we are invited to come to Christ and buy, it is "without money and without price." The secret of the Laodicean condition stands revealed. They are indifferent to Christ and filled with themselves because they have never made personal acquaintance with Christ.

Second, they need the "gold tried in the fire." The gold represents all the wealth of blessing that is secured to the believer through the death of Christ. The riches in which the Laodiceans boast — the vast benefactions of men and the stores of knowledge acquired by human efforts — make an imposing show before men, but are worthless in the sight of God. They will not stand the test of judgment, and hence will not meet the requirements of a holy God who is a consuming fire. As with every sinner, the Laodiceans need the gold tried in the fire that alone can be obtained by faith in Christ. Abandoning their own riches they must come to Christ empty-handed, poor and helpless, to obtain the true riches. Of old, Abraham obtained the promised seed entirely by the intervention of God. As far as Abraham was concerned he was "as good as dead" (Hebrews 11:11-12). In like manner it is as impossible for a sinner to justify himself from guilt in the sight of God by his own efforts as it would be for a dead man to do so. As far as doing anything to justify ourselves, we are "as good as dead." We are entirely shut up to the work of another — to Christ. But the sinner who believes in the risen Christ is justified in the sight of God from all things (Acts 13:38-39). Such an one has, like Paul, parted with his "own righteousness" in order that he may have the

righteousness "which is through faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith" (Php 3:9). He stands before God in a righteous condition as the result of what God has done through Christ on the cross, and not what man has done. This righteous condition is secured by divine righteousness, not human righteousness. In Christ in the glory, this righteous condition is set forth — He is our righteousness. This righteousness is "the gold tried in the fire."

Third, the Laodicean is further exhorted to obtain the "white raiment" that he may be clothed and that the shame of his nakedness does not appear. If the gold speaks of the divine righteousness in which the believer appears before God, the white raiment speaks of the righteousness of the saints in which they appear before men. To be naked is to be Christless before God and exhibit nothing of the character of Christ before others. The self-occupation, self-exaltation and self-sufficiency of the Laodicean are exactly opposite to the lowliness, meekness and gentleness of Christ. The wisdom of men and the intellectual attainments in which the Laodiceans may boast may indeed, like the fine clothes of the fashionable world, commend them to the great mass of unthinking men, but in the eyes of God’s people such things will only add to the shame of their nakedness. If it is only by coming to Christ in faith that we obtain a righteous condition before God — the gold tried in the fire — so it is only by personal acquaintance with Christ that we acquire the character of Christ that excludes the flesh with all its shame.

Fourth, the Lord counsels the Laodicean to anoint his eyes with eye-salve that he may see. The eye-salve secures that spiritual discernment which can only be obtained by faith in Christ and reception of the Holy Spirit. "Sight" and the gift of the Holy Spirit are strikingly connected in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. Ananias is sent to tell the man who had been blinded to everything of earth by the light from heaven, that "Jesus who appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me that thou mightest receive thy sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 9:17). Saul was a man whose fine natural mind had been trained to the highest pitch, and doubtless, like the Laodiceans, he believed he was thoroughly competent to judge all things. Yet so absolutely blind was this religious man, so ignorant of his own need, so ignorant of Christ and all that God is doing through Christ, that he was actually seeking to rid the earth of all that bore the Name of Christ. But this highly intellectual bigot — blinded to everything of Christ — is by grace brought into the presence of Jesus and immediately he is blinded to everything of earth in order to have his eyes opened in connection with the gift of the Holy Spirit. Henceforth, he sees everything on earth and in heaven in the power of the Holy Spirit. This means his "senses" are "exercised to discern both good and evil." He sees what is according to God because he is led by the Holy Spirit to view everything in relation to Christ. The Laodiceans, trusting in the fancied competency of the human mind, neglect Christ from whom alone they can receive the anointing of the Spirit. Confidence in self and indifference to Christ leave them in utter spiritual blindness. But, says the Apostle, writing to believers, "Ye brethren are not in darkness" (1 Thessalonians 5:4). "Ye were once darkness, but now ye are light in the Lord" (Ephesians 5:8). The anointing which we have received of Christ abides in us and enables us to "know all things" (1 John 2:20, 1 John 2:27).

Such then is the counsel of the Lord to the Laodiceans. He is not, however, content merely to give counsel and then let them go their way, for the Lord’s counsel is followed by: The Lord’s Dealings with the Laodiceans In spite of the solemn condition of the Laodiceans they still bear the Name of Christ and once stood as witness for Christ in the world. Hence the Lord can say to them, "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten." He lingers in love over the self-sufficient Laodiceans as in

other days He wept in love over self-righteous Jerusalem. Yet it is not the love of complacency that can rest with delight in its object, but rather the love of pity that is compelled to rebuke and chasten. If the time is not far distant when He will have to reject them with loathing, He will first seek to win with love and arouse with rebuke. If they steel their hearts against the love of His heart, and harden their conscience against the rebuke of His lips, then He will seek to reach them by the chastening of His hand. It may be that when brought low under His chastening hand, some self-sufficient Laodicean will discover that speculation of the mind, intellectual culture and modern thought will minister no comfort in the presence of sorrow, will bring no ease to a burdened conscience, no balm to a broken heart and no support in a dying hour; and that without Christ and the true riches, they are indeed "wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked."

Then mark the grace that follows. If through the Lord’s dealing in love, a Laodicean is brought to repentance, at once he will realize: The Lord’s Grace for the Laodicean The Laodicean condition may indeed call forth His loathing, but they themselves call forth His tender grace. If we would know the attitude the Lord takes towards the self-sufficient religious sinners who in these last days are boasting in the infidelity of modern thought, we have it clearly set forth in these words of marvellous grace, "Behold I stand at the door and am knocking." These are words indeed that speak of the crowning sin of the Laodiceans, for have they not shut Christ out, but also words that speak of the infinite grace of Christ, for does He not stand at their door and knock in order to come in? They may close their door upon Him, but they cannot close His heart against them. If they thrust Him out in utter indifference, He will wait at their door with perfect patience. Not once or twice does He knock and then retire, but He can say, "I stand at the door and am knocking" (JND). He is knocking and will continue knocking until the day of grace runs out.

Alas for those who reject such grace and keep their door locked and barred against the waiting Saviour. Grace rejected must end in judgment executed. Rejecting Christ, they will be cast forth by Christ to prove the appalling solemnity of those irrevocable words, "I have called and ye refused; I have stretched out My hand and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all My counsel and would none of My reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon Me, but I will not answer; they shall seek Me early, but they shall not find Me. For that they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would none of My counsel; they despised all My reproof. Therefore, shall they eat of the fruit of their own way and be filled with their own devices" (Proverbs 1:24, Proverbs 1:31). But it may be that some individual, brought to repentance, will indeed hear the voice of the Lord and open the door. Such will enjoy: The Lord’s Manifestation of Himself The work of God in the soul leading to repentance makes way for the voice of Christ to be heard, and the hearing of faith that listens to His voice will open the heart to receive Himself. The real answer to all the infidelity, latitudinarianism and self-sufficiency of Modernism is not found in falling back upon the orthodoxy of the creeds, but in letting Christ into the heart. The answer to Modernism, as well as the preservation from all that leads that way, is found in Christ Himself and in attachment of heart to Him. How rich the blessing that follows when Christ has His place in the affections. The Lord can say, "I will come in to him and will sup with him, and he with Me."

"If I let Christ have His place in my affections," one has truly said, "He will sympathize with me in my things and lead me into the communion of His things, and the practical result is that I gain the

most blessed intimate acquaintance with Christ Himself." How blessedly is this seen in that little band of disciples who in the upper room partook of that last supper with the Lord in their midst. He makes them so perfectly at home in His presence that John can lie upon His bosom. He enters into all their troubles, saying as it were, "I know the power of Satan that is against you, I know the treachery of Judas who will betray Me with a kiss, I know the weakness of Peter who will deny Me with an oath," but, "let not your hearts be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in Me." He knows that in the world they will have tribulation; but He says, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." He knows that the world will hate them, but He says, "If the world hate you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you." He knows that the world will persecute them, but He says, "these things will they do unto you because they have not known the Father, nor Me." He knows that they are filled with sorrow because He is leaving them; "nevertheless," He can say, "it is expedient for you that I go away." In all such tender consideration and sympathy for His own, was He not supping with them? But He does more; He leads them to sup with Him. Not only does He sympathize with them in their things, but He leads them into communion with Him in His things. He leads their thoughts away to the Father's house and to the Father's heart. He speaks of a new circle of love comprised of His "friends," where His peace is enjoyed, His love is known, His commandments cherished and His joy abides. And He tells them that One is coming who will guide them into all truth, tell them of things to come, and take of His things and show them unto them. Again we ask, as He engages their hearts with Himself and His interests, is He not leading them to sup with Him as before He had supped with them? Nor is it otherwise with the individual who, in our day, opens the door to Christ. He also finds One who with infinite tenderness and perfect sympathy, enters into all his exercises while at the same time he is led into the circle of the Lord's interests. So that though as an individual he opened the door to Christ, yet he is not left in isolation or independency of others, but is led to find his interests where Christ finds His, in company with those who call upon the Lord out of a pure heart. As we trace the ways of the Lord with the Laodiceans we cannot but marvel and adore in the presence of the perfect love and wisdom which can maintain truth and yet show such grace to such sinners. In absolute fidelity to truth the Lord exposes their condition, and having done so, with infinite wisdom He counsels them to buy of Himself the gold tried in the fire, the white raiment and the eye-salve. Then, in order that the exposure and the counsel may become effective, He deals with them in rebuke and chastening; and if under His dealings any repent, He reveals Himself as ready and waiting to bless. Lastly, if any man hear His voice and opens the door He manifests Himself in sympathy and communion. Thus, there passes before our delighted gaze:

· the truth of Christ that exposes · the wisdom of Christ that counsels · the love of Christ in His dealings · the grace of Christ that waits to bless · the delight of Christ to manifest Himself. As in the closing days of the Jewish apostasy, the darkness of the cross was lit up with the love of God, so in these last days of the Christian profession, the black background of modern religious infidelity serves to bring into relief the glories of Christ.

Feasting in the presence of Christ prepares the way for overcoming. To overcome the evil of the great professing mass that looms so large in this world is no small achievement. The power for such overcoming is alone found in the company of Christ, there to learn that He is the great Overcomer who can say, "I also overcame and am set down with My Father in His throne." At the end of His path the Lord could say to His disciples, "I have overcome the world," and as one has

truly said, the world the Lord overcame was the "Jewish world" of worldly religious profession and self-righteousness in its last and darkest day. The one who has supped with Christ, overcomes the world of Christian profession in its last dark days of lukewarmness and self-sufficiency. This indeed means that the overcomer, judging the whole Laodicean condition and separating from that which has shut Christ outside, finds himself where Christ is in the outside place. He "goes forth unto Christ without the camp, bearing His reproach." But the one who bears His reproach will share His glory, as the Lord can say, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne." That day will come when Christ's appreciation of the overcomer will be displayed before all the world, even as the Father's appreciation of Christ as the great Overcomer is witnessed by the place He now fills in the Father's throne. The address closes with the deeply important call to the one who has an ear, to listen to what the Spirit has to say to the churches. All may not be Laodicean in the full sense, but all are in danger of the Laodicean spirit and hence the warning to hear the Spirit's voice. The one who hears will judge every tendency to indifference to Christ, to assumption and to self-sufficiency. He will take his place apart from that which is so soon to be spewed out of Christ's mouth and he will make room for Christ to sup with Him in the day of His rejection while waiting to reign with Him in the day of His glory.

Section 3 Christ Glorified in His Church

Introduction This section is in two parts, the first part entitled "The Marriage of the Lamb," and the second part entitled "The Glory of the Bride." The first part transports us by God's revelation into the future to first show us the total destruction of the fake "church" (Babylon) and then the marriage of the Lamb. Then the true Church, the Bride of Christ, will be presented to Christ the Bridegroom, a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing. The Bride then will be dressed in fine linen, bright and pure, which are our acts done now for the love of Christ. Every act we do for Him now will come into display in that future day of glory! What a wonderful but sobering thought! The marriage of the Lamb then leads us directly into the second part of this Section. In the second part we are shown the holy Jerusalem. This is not a literal city, but a symbol or picture of the Church in Millennial times — when it will be displayed before the world for the glory of Christ. In this display the Church will have a glory — a manifested excellence — beyond our greatest expectations. This City is then beautifully described, verse by verse, and contrasted with the false church as also seen under the symbol of a city — Babylon. We are shown what is not there, and then permitted to delight in the blessings that are there; blessings that await each one of us who know the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord (Ed.).

Part 1 The Marriage of the Lamb — Revelation 19:1-9 In Revelation 18:1-24 we are permitted to see the final overthrow of the corrupt Papal system.* For long centuries it has claimed to be the Church of Christ and representative of God upon the earth. As to fact, it has through the ages deceived the nations, corrupted the world and drenched the earth with the blood of saints.

{*This false church (Babylon) is evidently a combination of all those left of Christendom after the Rapture, out of the various denominations and isms all around us today. It is a false "world-church," although dominated by and organized along the lines of present-day Catholicism. But I would suggest that it is more than present-day Roman Catholicism: it is Roman Catholicism in its final form (Ed.).} The outstanding characteristics of this corrupt system are summarized in verses 23 and 24 of the chapter.

There we read, "Thy merchants were the great men of the earth." While professing to be the Church — the Bride of Christ — it entirely falsifies the truth of the Church, being marked by "merchandise" and "earth" instead of faith and heaven. It professes to confer every spiritual blessing in return for money paid to the church: in place of preaching faith in the living Christ, salvation, pardon and heaven itself can be purchased with gold. It traffics in the souls and bodies of men (Revelation 18:13).

Then we read, "By thy sorceries were all nations deceived." Instead of being the pillar and ground of the truth, and proclaiming the grace of God to sinners, it has deceived with error and bewitched the world with music, art and every possible device to appeal to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life.

Finally we read, "In her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all that were slain upon the earth." Instead of protecting, it has persecuted the saints. Instead of holding forth the Word of Life to dying sinners, it has carried death among the living saints.

Here then we have a system professing to be the Church of God that is characterized by money instead of faith; that is earthly instead of heavenly; that deceives with error rather than enlightening by truth; that persecutes instead of protecting; and brings death instead of life to men. For long centuries God has borne with this corrupt church, but at last there comes the day of her judgment — the hour of her desolation — in which she is overthrown with swift and overwhelming destruction. "For strong is the Lord God who judgeth her" (Revelation 18:8).

Following upon her judgment there is weeping and wailing upon earth; but heaven, with all the saints, apostles and prophets, are called to rejoice (Revelation 18:20, JND). The response to this call is given in the opening verses of Revelation 19:1-21. John hears "a great voice of much people in heaven saying, Hallelujah; salvation and glory and power unto the Lord our God." The salvation, glory and power which Babylon had arrogated to herself are ascribed by heaven to the Lord our God.

Moreover, the judgment of this false system is the vindication of God. His judgments are seen to be "true and righteous" (Revelation 19:2). The judgment of Babylon is the public demonstration that through the long ages God has not been indifferent either to the corruptions of this system or to the persecution of His saints. The judgment will be according to the truth of all the corruptions and persecutions as seen by the all-searching eye of God; and being according to truth, will be in perfect righteousness. Heaven rejoices that it is so. Heaven adds its Hallelujah to God’s judgments. And God will have a perpetual witness to the overwhelming judgment of this false church, for we read, "Her smoke rose up for ever and ever" (Revelation 19:3). The Papal church looms large in the eyes of men today, but in the years to come the only trace that she ever existed will be the smoke of her torment that throughout Millennial ages will bear witness to her irrevocable doom and God’s holy hatred of her corruptions.

All heaven responds to the call to rejoice over the fall of Babylon. Then a more limited circle — the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures — take up the praise. They say nothing of the judgment of the great whore. It is true they add their "Amen" to all that God has done, but they are occupied with God Himself. Hence they fall down and worship God who sits upon the throne saying, "Amen; Hallelujah."

Then at last one voice speaks from the throne saying, "Praise our God, all ye His servants and ye who fear Him, both small and great." The first call to praise had been to "saints, apostles and prophets" to rejoice over the judgment of the great whore: this second call is to all heaven to "Praise our God." There had been a glad response to the first call, but it is far exceeded by the overwhelming volume of praise that is called forth by the voice from the throne, for, says John, "I heard as a voice of a great crowd and as a voice of many waters and as a voice of strong thunders, saying, Hallelujah, for the Lord our God the Almighty has taken to Himself kingly power. Let us rejoice and exult and give Him glory; for the marriage of the Lamb is come and His wife has made herself ready" (Revelation 19:6-7 JND). In this great burst of praise, we have the celebration of two transcendent events for which the ages have waited:

1. The establishment of the kingdom of Christ 2. The marriage of the Lamb

These great events awaited the setting aside of that false church that for so long had dishonoured Christ while professing to act in His Name; that had set aside His work while parading the symbol of His cross; that had deceived the nations while pretending to give salvation; that had corrupted Christendom with error while professing to maintain the truth; that had hounded the saints to death while professing to show the way of life. As a great city she had reigned over the kings of the earth. As the great whore she had masqueraded as the Bride of Christ. Her reign being ended, her false claims set aside, the way is at once prepared for the reign of Christ and the marriage of the Lamb. The heavens are soon to open for Christ to come forth and reign over the earth as King of kings, but before the reign on earth there is the marriage in heaven. The marriage of the Lamb must precede the reign of the king.

Here we may all pause and contemplate the wondrous story of the Lamb. Patriarchs, prophets and apostles had at different times and in varied ways borne witness to the sufferings of the Lamb. Abraham, in the day of the offering up of Isaac, foresaw the coming of the Lamb provided by God to suffer as the burnt offering. Isaiah, in his day, with nearer and clearer vision, spoke of the perfect submission of the Lamb in the day of His suffering. And when at last the Lamb is come to earth, John, the forerunner, looking upon Jesus as He walked, can say, "Behold the Lamb of God," and foretell the far reaching effect of His sufferings. And when those sufferings are accomplished, the apostle Peter can assure the elect that they are redeemed "with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot." Later when Peter had put off his tabernacle, John, from his Patmos prison, carries us into the future and shows us things to come. In company with him we pass through the door opened in heaven, there to view the great host of the redeemed, the thousand times ten thousand of angelic beings, and "in the midst of the throne . . . a Lamb as it had been slain." Yet a little later John, having shown us the glory of the Lamb, conducts us to the marriage of the Lamb.

Moreover, if patriarchs, prophets and apostles had foreseen and dwelt upon the sufferings of the Lamb, likewise many a bridal scene had pictured the marriage of the Lamb. The marriage of Isaac speaks of the satisfaction of love that he finds in his bride (Genesis 24:67). The marriage of Joseph tells of the recompense for toil and loss that he found in Asenath (Genesis 41:50-52). The marriage of Boaz speaks of the fame he acquires on the occasion of his union with Ruth (Ruth 4:11).

Thus in prophecy and picture, God has ever kept before us the Lamb and the marriage of the Lamb, the sufferings and the glory that shall follow; for all these bridal scenes will have their glorious answer in the great day of the marriage of the Lamb. For that day Christ, the true Isaac, is waiting in glory; and towards that day we like Rebekah, in company with the servant, are moving across this wilderness world under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. When at last the marriage of the Lamb is come, then indeed the suffering Lamb will find in the Church — His Bride — an object that will satisfy His love, recompense Him for His suffering and toil, and one through whom He will acquire fame, for on the day of the marriage the great multitude, as the voice of many waters and as the voice of many thunderings, will declare His fame and celebrate His praise.

Here then we are permitted to look beyond the present moment in which the Bride is being sanctified and cleansed and nourished and cherished, to the day when the Church will be presented to the Bridegroom a glorious Church not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.

Then we are told that "she hath made herself ready," indicating that the judgment seat of Christ is passed. All that in her wilderness journey which was contrary to Christ has not only been met by the atoning sufferings of Christ at the cross, but has been reviewed in the presence of Christ at His judgment seat. There every question has been solved, every difficulty removed and the Bride fully learns His mind about every detail of the path; henceforth to think with Him about it all. Thus all that was not of Christ has been dealt with and only what is of Christ remains for His approval and delight. Nothing in the past will rise up to cast a shade upon that fair scene or mar the fulness of joy on the marriage day.

Furthermore we are told of the adorning of the Bride, for we read, "It was given her that she should be clothed in fine linen, bright and pure, for the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints" (Revelation 19:8, JND). The false woman had also clothed herself with fine linen (Revelation 18:16) but how different from the Bride of Christ. With the harlot her fine linen was acquired by "merchandise" (Revelation 18:12); with the Bride the fine linen was "given." The Bride’s adornment speaks of her own acts, yet they were all the outcome of grace given. Outwardly, many acts of righteousness may look alike, whether done by believers or unbelievers, and yet the motive be very different. The acts of righteousness of the false woman had a legal and selfish motive. The righteousnesses of the saints are acts done for the love of Christ.

Christ will delight to see His Bride invested with a robe that speaks of the love of His Bride for Himself. Happy for us to realize that every act that we do out of love to Christ is a stitch in the robe in which we shall appear in glory for the delight of the heart of Christ. What a joy to know that though we may be of no account in the world, unnoticed, despised and misunderstood, yet every little act that is done out of love to Christ will at last come into display in a day of glory. Not a cup of cold water given to one of His little ones will be forgotten by Christ. All that has been done for Him; all that has been expended upon Him; all of this world that has been refused for Him; all will be remembered in the day of glory. The thoughtful act of some loving heart that provided a pillow for His comfort in the day of His lowly service; the feast that was spread at Bethany for His refreshment and the ointment poured upon His feet in the day of His rejection; the confession of the dying thief in the day of His suffering; and the love that constrained Him to enter the house at Emmaus on the day of His resurrection, will all be remembered in the day of His glory. The tears

that love has shed for Him, the prayers that have been uttered for His sake, the sufferings that have been borne for His Name, as well as every true answer to His last request to "Do this in remembrance of Me." will come up for remembrance in the day of glory, "for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints." Yet again, let us remember, all will be the fruit of His own grace, for "it was given to her that she should be clothed in fine linen." The garment we shall wear then is being woven now. The robe we shall put on with gladness in the presence of Christ in the day of glory is being woven amid the sorrows of earth in the day of His rejection. The sorrows of earth, the trials by the way, the rough ways, the dark days, the weariness and weakness are being used for the trial of our faith to call forth the graces of Christ. The meekness and lowliness, the patience and gentleness, the grace and love of Christ, which the trial of faith calls forth are being wrought into the warp and the woof of the garment that will be worn on the day of the marriage of the Lamb. Well may we sing, With mercy and with judgment Our web of time He wove, And aye the dews of sorrow Were lustred with His love.

We'll bless the hand that guided, We'll bless the heart that planned. When throned where glory dwelleth In Immanuel's land.

Thus we are carried on to the day of the marriage of the Lamb. The scene indeed, as one has said, is only intimated and not described, for it is no part of the Revelation to unfold the inner scenes of glory. In the Paradise of God there are things unspeakable and incomprehensible to those who are yet in mortal bodies. Enough has been told to set the heart longing for the day of the marriage of the Lamb: the day long purposed in the counsels of God, foreshadowed in many a bridal scene and foretold by prophets and apostles: the day to which the Bride on earth is journeying and for which Christ in heaven is waiting: the day of the gladness of His heart. When at last the day dawns, it will be celebrated with feasting: there will not only be the marriage, but the marriage supper of the Lamb. It will truly be the day of the gladness of His heart, but others will be called to share in the joy and gladness of the feast. They will not be present as the Bride of the Lamb, but as the guests at the feast. They are not angelic hosts since they are "called. " Angels who have kept their first estate are not characterized as "called." The "call" comes to fallen men from the God of glory to call them into the glory of God. Of such there is a great host called by the grace of God throughout the ages before the cross. They will not form the Bride of Christ, but like the companions who follow the King's daughter, they will be brought unto the King. "With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought: they shall enter into the King's palace" (Psalms 45:13-15).

Whether, however, it be the angelic hosts, or the Bride, or the guests who are called to share in the supper, all will unite in homage to the Lamb. As with the voice of many waters and as with the voice of mighty thunderings they say, "let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him."

Part 2 The Glory of the Bride — Revelation 21:9-27, Revelation 22:1-5 The Revelation closes with the vision of the holy city — the New Jerusalem.* To realize its meaning we must, at the outset, rid our minds of a thought fostered by sentiment that the holy City is a literal description of the eternal home of believers. In a book where all other visions are symbolic, it is unlikely that, in this vision, symbols should give place to literal description. The City is expressly said to be "the Bride the Lamb's wife;" hence it is clear that the City is a symbol of the Church in glory. Yet we judge from many a detail that it is not solely a symbol of the saints themselves, but rather a symbolic description both of the Church in glory and of her eternal home.

{*Notice in Scripture, that this City, a symbol of the Church, is called "the holy city, Jerusalem'' (Revelation 21:10, JND), or "the holy Jerusalem'' (KJV) during Millennial times, but is called "the holy city, new Jerusalem" (Revelation 21:2, JND, KJV) in the eternal state (Ed.).}

Moreover while all that characterizes the City will surely abide for eternity, yet it is a vision of the Church in relation to the earth during Millennial days. The mention of the nations, the kings of the earth and the necessity for healing would prove that the City is the figure of the Church as the heavenly centre of government for the world to come.

Before seeking to interpret the vision, it will be well to remember the distinction between the truth of the Church as presented by the Apostle Paul and by the Apostle John. Paul in his doctrine always takes us to heaven, whereas John brings heavenly things to earth. Thus the ministry of Paul sets the Church before God in heaven; and if he speaks of the Bride he does not go beyond presenting her to Christ all glorious. John carries us a stage further and tells us not only of the marriage of the Lamb — when the Church will be presented to Christ for His supreme satisfaction and joy, but of the glory of the Bride when she will be displayed before the world for the glory of Christ. Being satisfied with the Church at the marriage of the Lamb, Christ will be glorified in the Church before the world. Only that which satisfies Christ can glorify Christ.

Thus the heavenly City presents the Church, not in her intimate relations with Christ as the Bride, but in her glories as displayed before the world as the centre of blessing and government for the glory of Christ. Further we may add that though John presents the Church "descending out of heaven," he does not see it descending to earth. It will be displayed in relation to earth as a testimony to God, for the glory of Christ and for the blessing of the nations who will walk in the light of it, but it is not said that the Church will be on earth in Millennial days.

Further, in reading this description of the Church in glory, we cannot fail to realize the solemn contrast that is presented by the Church in her passage through this world as presented in Revelation 2:1-29 and Revelation 3:1-22. In the addresses to the seven Churches at the opening of the Revelation, we see the ruin of the Church under the responsibility of man: in the holy City at the end of the Revelation we have the glory of the Church according to the counsels of God.

It is significant that the ruin of the Church in responsibility commenced at Ephesus where the labours of the Apostle Paul culminated in unfolding the highest doctrines of Christianity. Two great objects were before the Apostle; first, to link up the hearts of the saints with Christ in glory, as he can say, "I have espoused you to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:2). Second, that the saints on earth should be a faithful witness to Christ, "blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation among whom ye shine as lights in the world: holding forth the Word of Life" (Php 2:15-16). Thus the Apostle laboured that the saints should be marked by "love" and "light" — love to Christ and light before the world. The words "love" and "light" are indeed characteristic of his epistle to the Ephesians. He seeks that we may be rooted and grounded in love and know the love of Christ which passes knowing; then he says we are "light in the Lord" and exhorts us to "walk as children of light." In the first address to the "seven churches" in Revelation 2:1-29, we learn how entirely the assembly at Ephesus had failed in maintaining love to Christ and light before the world. The Lord has to say to Ephesus "Thou hast left thy first love," and warns the assembly that unless they repent, He will remove the candlestick. If their first love to Christ is lost, their light before the world

will cease. Here then we have the commencement of the ruin into which the Church has fallen — the loss of bridal affection for Christ with the consequent loss of light before the world.

Admitting the ruin, at once we see the grace that has given the vision of the City so that we may be encouraged to look beyond the ruin and see the Church presented to Christ in the fulness of love at the marriage of the Lamb, and yet a little later behold the Church as the holy City, shining in the light of the Lamb — resplendent with the glories of the Lamb, the nations walking in its light. Then at last, "love" and "light" will be realized in perfection in the Church displayed in glory according to the counsels of God.

Furthermore let us remember that these visions are not unrolled before us simply for our encouragement, nor only to engage our minds with that which is supremely blessed, but also that the light of what is to come may be thrown upon our pathway in the present. In the City we see actually set forth in perfection what God would have morally set forth in the Church during her passage through this world. The Angel and the Mountain (Revelation 3:9)

It is not without reason that the Spirit of God has specially recorded that it was one of the seven angels who had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, who was deputed to show John the glory of the Bride the Lamb's wife under the symbol of a city. Turning back to Revelation 17:1 we learn that it was also one of these seven angels who showed John the judgment of the great whore under the symbol of Babylon. Thus God calls our attention to the contrast between Babylon the great and Jerusalem the holy. In one city there is everything of man and nothing of Christ; in the other everything speaks of Christ. It is a solemn consideration that everybody in Christendom is either working for great Babylon — the city that is going to be judged by Christ — or for the holy Jerusalem — the City that will display the glory of Christ. Nor is it difficult to discover for which city we are working. Is Christ or man our object? If man is our object, whether self or others — if we are seeking to improve, elevate, please and exalt man — we are helping to build great Babylon. If Christ is our object we are working in the interests of the New Jerusalem. Alas! the great mass of Christendom are definitely and avowedly working only for the improvement and elevation of man, to make, as they say, "a better and brighter world," and thus are erecting a vast system without God or Christ, which God calls Babylon. We do well, however, to remember how subtle is the flesh, that though by grace we may be citizens of the New Jerusalem, we may in practice be lured into helping on the interests of Babylon by adopting the methods and aims of the religious world.

Further, the different viewpoints of the two cities are instructive. The fact that Babylon is seen from a wilderness in contrast to the great and high mountain from which the Holy City is viewed, would indicate that for the detection of evil no great moral elevation is required. The man of the world, though he falls far short of God's estimate of evil, can go far, as history has shown, in recognizing and condemning the corruptions of Christendom. To enter, however, into the blessedness of the Holy City is utterly beyond the capacity of the natural mind. Even in the saint of God it calls for the moral elevation of soul and separation from this world, symbolized by the great and high mountain. It may be we make slow progress in entering into deep things of God because we are not prepared for the separation and elevation of the great and high mountain. To reach the height with its vast view and heavenly atmosphere entails more labour than our easy-going Christianity can put forth. Hence we at times find it more congenial to live at a lower level, in more contracted surroundings, breathing the atmosphere of earth. But if, like John, our affections are set on things

above, the Holy Spirit is ready to carry us away to the great and high mountain to have unrolled before our vision the vast counsels of God for Christ and the Church. The Characteristics of the City (Revelation 2:9-10) The first view of the City discloses to the Apostle John its outstanding characteristics.

First, we learn it is "the holy city Jerusalem." The words "that great city" are not in the original Greek. The word "great" is only once used in connection with the City, when the wall is described. In contrast, the city of Babylon is seven times described as "great," but it is never called "holy." Greatness appeals to man and marks his city: holiness is the characteristic of God's city. It must be so: the City which displays the glory of God must be according to the nature of God.

Secondly, the City is seen "descending out of heaven," not only proving that the rapture must have taken place, but indicating that the Church is heavenly in character. In its passage through this world, how entirely the heavenly character of the Church has been lost or obscured. When, however, the Church comes into display in the Millennium, what is already true to faith will become manifest to all — that the Church is comprised of believers taken out from the Jews and Gentiles and blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.

Thirdly, the City comes "from God." The Church is heavenly in character and is divine in origin. In contrast the great religious systems of Christendom, finding their extreme expression in Babylon, not only stand condemned by their earthly character, but by their obviously human origin.

Fourthly, the City descends out of heaven from God "having the glory of God. " The glory of God signifies the display of God in all His attributes. Babylon "glorified herself." In the great city of Babylon all the wisdom, intelligence, power and skill of man is seen in full display. In the heavenly City all the attributes of God are in display. The City is resplendent with the glory of God.

Here then we have the outstanding characteristics of the Church in glory. Comparing the religious systems of Christendom we are at once arrested by the solemn contrast they present to the heavenly City in its four leading characteristics. The City is holy in nature, heavenly in character, divine in origin, and for the glory of God. Alas, man's great religious systems are corrupt in nature, worldly in character, human in origin and for the glory of man. If we would answer to God's mind and order our path according to His Word and walk in the light of the City, the practical effect of the vision would be to separate us from every religious system which by its principles or practice makes the maintenance of holiness impossible; which is earthly in character; which has its origin from man; and the object of which is simply the glory and benefit of man rather than for the glory of God.

If the world in a day to come will walk in the light of the City, it surely becomes the believer to do so now. The Shining of the City (Revelation 2:11) The Apostle John proceeds to speak of the "shining" of the City, for thus it should read, "Her shining (not "her light") was like a most precious stone, as a crystal — like jasper stone"

(JND). The word "shining" is only used in one other passage — Php 2:15. There we read, "Ye shine as lights in the world." No figure could more fitly express the truth as to the light of the Church than the shining of a precious stone. However precious, the stone has no light in itself: it can only shine by reflected light. If placed in darkness, it ceases to shine. So the Church will shine by reflecting the light of Christ. "The Lamb is the light" of the City and the City shines by reflecting

the light of the Lamb. Let us remember that what will be true in glory should be true on our way to glory. We are set to "shine as lights in the world. " Hence it is that in the early part of Php 2:1-29, Christ is set before us in all the perfection and beauty of His lowly grace. As we walk in the light of all that He is, we shall in that measure exhibit the graces of Christ. We shall only shine as we are in the light, and this shining will be reflected light. It will not be self but Christ who will be seen. Babylon displays the glory of man: the heavenly City will reflect Divine glory, for her shining is "like a jasper stone" — the stone which in Revelation 4:3 is used to set forth the glory of God. The Wall of the City (Revelation 2:12) The City "had a wall great and high." The wall speaks of security and exclusion. The wall is "great," and thus the City is secured against every assault of the enemy. It is "high," and therefore all evil is excluded. The great wall cannot be broken down; the high wall cannot be scaled. Had the Church on earth walked in the light of the Church in glory, it never would have become likened to a "great house" in which there are vessels "to honour and some to dishonour." No vessels to "dishonour" will be found in the holy City, for "there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth." The wall separates the City from all outside. Had the Church maintained a holy separation from the world, it would have been proof against the attacks of the enemy and the intrusion of the evil. The apprehension of the truth symbolized by the great and high wall would in practice lead us to depart from iniquity and separate from vessels to dishonour. Every departure from the principle of exclusion of evil had led to a corresponding departure from the truth. The Gates of the City (Revelation 2:12-13) The City has twelve gates, four on every side; at the gates twelve angels, with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel written upon the gates. Gates are for entrance and exit, and thus speak of reception and outflow. If the walls symbolize exclusion from the City of all that is not of Christ, the gates symbolize the reception of only what is according to Christ. In Scripture the gate of a city is well known to be the place of governmental judgment, and angels are the heavenly executors of judgment. The angels are there to bar the way to all that is contrary to the divine judgment passed upon the flesh, even as of old when Cherubims with a flaming sword kept "the way of the tree of life." The names of the twelve tribes indicate the outflow of blessing from the City and the direction it takes. In earthly cities men often call the main streets of their cities by the names of the towns to which they lead. So in the heavenly City the gates bear names of the Tribes to which the blessings of the City flow. This blessing will flow in equal measure to every quarter of the globe, for there are three gates on each of the four sides of the City. Had the Church walked in the light of the City, she would have received only what is of Christ and thus would have become a testimony to Christ — a source of blessing to the world around. Alas! the professing Church, having become Laodicean, has closed the door against Christ and let in everything of man — things that appeal to nature and gratify the lusts of the flesh — and thus has become a source of corruption to the world. The Foundations of the City (Revelation 2:14) The wall of the city had twelve foundations and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. The names of the twelve apostles connect the City with the foundation work of the apostles at Pentecost. By their work under the control of the Holy Spirit, the Church was formed on earth as the House of God where God dwells, rules and blesses. A sphere of heavenly blessing and rule was thus formed on earth. This work, commenced on earth through the instrumentality of the apostles, is seen in its completion in the City in glory. This indicates that the City does not set forth the Church as presented by the Apostle Paul in its intimate relations to Christ as the body of Christ, nor in its privileges of access to the Father’s house. It is the aspect of the Church presented by the twelve — the vessel for the display of the glory of God before the

world. The Measuring of the City (Revelation 2:15-17)

John records that the Angel who talked with him "had a golden reed to measure the city." It is not only that certain measurements are given, but that the City is measured; as we read, "he measured the City," and again, "he measured the wall." This indicates that the City is tested by being measured and that all answers to the Divine test. All is found to be exact; nothing falls short of perfection, nothing is out of place, for "the length and the breadth and the height of it are equal."

Gold is the well known symbol of Divine righteousness. The City being measured by the golden reed thus sets forth that all is tested by Divine righteousness with the result that the City, the gates and the walls entirely meet the requirements of Divine righteousness. The City is thus the display of the righteousness of God in Christ — the answer to the cross of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21). The Materials of the City (Revelation 2:18-21)

"The wall of it was jasper." From Revelation 4:3 we learn that jasper is a figure of the Divine glory of Christ. It is His glory that excludes all evil from the City. With a deeper sense of the glory of the One who dwells in the Church, we should realize how impossible to connect evil with His Name. The glory secures the exclusion of all that defiles.

"The City was pure gold* like unto clear glass," setting forth the absolute righteousness and holiness that characterizes the City. We know the new man is created in righteousness and true holiness, but there is now often much about believers that speaks of the "old man" and his ways. In every child of God there is the real gold, but with some alloy of baser metal. In the City the dross will be gone. There the gold is pure without alloy. There too all will be transparent like clear glass. There will be no obscurity — no hidden motives.

{*Just as gold speaks of divine righteousness, pure gold seems to carry us a step further to include the glory and deity of Christ (Ed.).} The foundations were "garnished with all manner of precious stones." There is variety in the stones, but all are precious. The stones are not a source of light, but they reflect and refract light and thus exhibit the beautiful colours of light. Christ is the light; in Him all excellencies are combined in perfection to form the light. In His people every excellency is set forth in detail to exhibit, as it were, the colours of the light.

It is not without significance that the description of the gates follows the foundations. If the commencement of a city is set forth in laying the foundations, the completion of the city is seen in setting up the gates (Joshua 6:26). In this city there is no diminution in perfection: the gates are as perfect as the foundations. Not only are the foundations adorned with precious stones, but every gate is a precious stone. The one pearl of which each gate is formed may set forth the preciousness of the Church to Christ. This we may gather from Matthew 13:46 where the Church is alluded to under the figure of "one pearl of great price." From every point of approach the City will exhibit the preciousness of the Church to Christ. It is true that everything in the City speaks of the preciousness of Christ. Today He is precious to those who believe (1 Peter 2:7). In a day to come, all the world will see in the Church how precious Christ is to God, but they will also see how precious the Church is to Christ. Then will be fulfilled the Lord’s own words to Philadelphia, "I will make them to come and worship before thy feet and to know that I have loved thee." The street of the City was pure Gold. The street of an earthly city is the place of public resort where men come in contact with one another, where we have to be on our guard, speak with reserve and walk as it

were with girded loins for fear of defilement. In the heavenly City there will be no need for the girded loin. There will be nothing to defile: the street is pure gold. There will be no need for reserve, for there will be nothing to hide from one another. All will be transparent.

Things That Are Not in the City (Revelation 2:22-27) No temple. "I saw," says John, "no temple therein." The temple hid God behind a veil. It concealed His glory and involved a special priesthood by which men could approach to worship, but not immediately* draw near to God. In the City there is no temple — nothing that will conceal God. The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. They fill the City: access to God is immediate.* How little Christendom has walked in the light of the City is evident inasmuch as "temples" have again been set up after a Jewish pattern, with priests between the people and God. Thus the true conception of the Assembly (Church) with Christ in the midst has been entirely lost.

{*Used in the sense of nothing or no one in between God and man. Such drawing near was not possible in temple days (Ed.).} No light of the sun nor of the moon. The sun and moon are natural lights symbolic of the natural mind of man. Such light will not be there, and where all will have the mind of Christ, will not be needed. "The glory of God has enlightened it and the lamp thereof is the Lamb" (Revelation 2:23, JND). God is the light and the Lamb is the "Light-bearer" through whom the light reaches the City. The City reflects the light of Christ and the nations walk in the light of the City. Thus the prayer of our Lord in John 17:23 (JND) will have its perfect answer — "I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected into one; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me and that Thou hast loved them as Thou hast loved Me." God will be perfectly revealed in Christ, reflected by the Church and seen by the nations. As a result "the kings of the earth do bring their glory to it" (Revelation 2:24, JND). They will own that the heavens do rule, not by the light of the sun, but by the light of the City, and that all their glory is subject to the rule of the city. No closed gates. The gates of the City shall "not be shut at all by day." There will be no cessation of the outflow of blessing. Today the professing Church, with Laodicean indifference, has closed its doors upon Christ, and as a result Christ has closed its door to the world. He has ceased to use it as a channel of blessing to the world. In the heavenly City, the Lamb is the light thereof, and thus blessing will flow to man and that unceasingly since the gates will not be shut. No night. "There shall be no night there." Not only will the light of the City never cease, it will never grow dim. Darkness is ignorance of God even as light is the knowledge of God. Today our light is often hindered by our ignorance. Our ignorance largely results from seeking to walk in the light of our own reason rather than by the light of Christ, thus having His mind. Had we always a single eye to Christ and His glory, our whole body would be full of light, having no part dark. In the City no shade of darkness will obscure the light that shines upon the world, for there will be no night there. No evil. "There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth. " There will be no intrusion of the flesh to defile. There will be nothing that can raise an idol between the soul and God — no abomination. There will be nothing that deceives — no lie. Moreover, it is not only that the flesh, with its defilements, abominations and lies is not here, but it shall in no wise enter there. This was never said of the garden of delights on earth. There indeed all was perfect as created by the hand of God, but of Eden it was not said that evil "shall in no wise enter." In the City we have not only a City of perfection, but a City beyond the possibility of defilement. They alone will enter who are written in the Lamb’s book of life. The Blessings of the City (Revelation 22:1-5)

We have seen that the things of nature and of the fall are not there, are not needed there and will never enter there. Now we are permitted to delight in the positive blessings that are there — blessings that provide for the well-being of the City.

First, there is "a river of water of life" (Revelation 22:1), a symbol of the fulness of life in the Spirit flowing from the throne. In an early part of the Revelation when John was raptured to heaven, he records that "out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices;" fit symbols of the holy judgments of God that were about to proceed from the throne. Here we have passed beyond the judgment and learn that the throne that dealt out judgment to the nations has become the source of unceasing blessing to the City. For the City, the judgments of the throne were exhausted at the Cross. The fulness of blessing in the City by the Spirit, is the glorious answer to the Cross.

Second, we learn that in the midst of the street of the City and on either side of the river is the tree of life (Revelation 22:2). The river speaks of the Holy Spirit as the Water of Life; the Tree speaks of Christ as the Food of Life. The City will be sustained in perennial freshness by drinking of the River of Life and feeding on the Tree of Life. The River will never fail, the Tree will never wither and the City will never grow old. At the end of Millennial days John sees "the holy City, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a Bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21:2). A thousand years have rolled away, but the bridal freshness of the City remains.

Thirdly, we have the fruits of the tree, for we read that the Tree of Life "bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month" (Revelation 22:2). The fruits speak of the varied glories of Christ. It is not enough to know and feed upon Christ in one aspect. We need Christ in His fulness, and the City will be sustained in perennial freshness by successive unfoldings of His graces and excellencies.

Fourth, the leaves of the tree will be for the healing of the nations (Revelation 22:2). Just as the City will find in Christ a source of perennial vigour, the nations will find in Christ the source of healing. The judgments of the nations will be over. It will not be the lord Jesus revealed from heaven in flaming fire dealing in destruction with those who know not God, but Christ in the midst of the City as the Tree of Life bringing healing to the sore-stricken nations. The nations that for long centuries have been torn with strife and violence, will find healing in the appreciation of Christ in His beauty, for the leaves set forth His outward beauty. Strife and conflict, jealousy and distrust will be ended by a leaf from the Tree of Life. Christ seen in the perfection of His way will end strife among the nations; even as Christ apprehended in His graces brings healing between the Lord’s people today.

Fifth, the throne of God and the Lamb shall be in it (Revelation 22:3). The seat of God’s righteous judgment for the Millennial earth will be established in the City. The curse will be gone and hence the throne will dispense blessing rather than judgment. It will be the happy privilege of the saints to serve in dispensing the blessings of the throne.

Sixth, His Name shall be in their foreheads (Revelation 22:4). They will see His face and He will be seen in their faces. Even now if we looked more steadily in His face we would more truly reflect His graces. Gazing upon the glory of the Lord we should be changed into the same image from glory to glory. In the City we shall no longer see through a glass darkly, but then face to face. And when we see "no man any more save (except) Jesus only," then only Christ will be seen in the saints.

The names we have borne on earth will have passed forever. No more will "thief" be written on the brow of the saved malefactor, nor "sinner" upon the woman of Luke 7:36-39, nor will "Pharisee" be seen on the face of Saul of Tarsus. These names will have passed with the lives that earned them and the Name of Christ will alone be written on every sinless brow.

Seventh, "The Lord God giveth them light (Revelation 22:5). Not only will the City be filled with life, for the River of Life and the Tree of Life will be there; not only will it be the home of love, for "JESUS" the Name of love is written on every brow; but it will be filled with light, "for the Lord God giveth them light." The City will never know any trace of darkness — no clouds or shadows — for "there shall be no night there." The prophetic lamp will no longer be needed to guide us through the encircling gloom. The night will be gone, the lamp put out, the brightness of the sun be dimmed, and the City shall bask for eternity in the light of the Lord God.

Moreover, through Millennial days these blessings will never fail, for "they shall reign for ever and ever. " We shall find in the Paradise of God a River whose waters never run dry, a Tree whose fruit never fails, with Leaves that never wither. There too will be a Throne that will never be shaken, a Name that will never lose its lustre and a Light that will never grow dim. No soil of nature’s evil No touch of man’s rude hand Shall e’er disturb around us That bright and blissful land. The charms that woo the senses Shall be as bright as fair, For all, while breathing round us, Shall tell of Jesus there.

What light, when all its beaming Shall own Him as the Sun!

What music when its breathing Shall bear His Name along! No pause, no change of pleasure No cloud to dim our view, The draught that lulls our thirsting Shall wake our thirst anew.

Chapter 19

S. God . . . a Very Present Help

"God . . . a Very Present Help."

Psalms 46:1-11.

Two truths of great practical importance, for believers of every dispensation, are brought before us in this beautiful Psalm. In the presence of the upheavals and conflicts of a godless world, we are reminded, first, that God is "a very present help in trouble." Secondly, in order to realise, and obtain, the present help of God, our part is to "be still" and know that God is God (Psalms 46:1 and Psalms 46:10). Only faith can enter into these truths. Flesh can lean upon an arm of flesh; but flesh can neither trust in God, nor "be still" and wait for God to act.

Psalms 46:1 presents the great theme of the Psalm — God, our refuge, strength, and present help in trouble.

Psalms 46:2-3 the trouble and confusion of the world through which we are passing.

Psalms 46:4-11, the means whereby God sustains the faith of His people so that they are enabled to "be still" and prove God to be "a very present help." The Present Help.

(Psalms 46:1). We do well to notice the little word "our" in the opening verse. It is true that God is a refuge; but believers can say, "God is our refuge." The world has those to whom it looks for protection, and guidance, in the time of trouble. Believers have in God their refuge from the storms and distresses of life. Moreover, God is our "strength" in weakness, and "a very present help in trouble." The better and more exact translation is, "a help in distresses very readily found." To realise, however, that God is "a very present help," calls for the exercise of faith, for His present help is not always immediately apparent. Sometimes we have to wait for the manifestation of His present help. Our natural tendency is to endeavour to extricate ourselves from trouble by our own efforts, and God may, for our blessing, keep us waiting until we have learnt that we are utterly without strength to meet the trial, and there is nothing left for us but to "be still" and learn that God is God. Was it not thus, in the gospel day, that the Lord dealt with Martha and Mary when faced with the sickness of their brother? They were in sore trouble, and in their distress the Lord was their refuge. They rightly turned to Him and spread out their trouble before Him. They said, "He whom Thou lovest is sick." The Lord was indeed "a present help," though His help was not immediately forthcoming. Having received the urgent appeal of the sisters, we read that "He abode two days still in the same place where He was." Apparently He was doing nothing. He waited until death closed all hope in human efforts, and there was nothing left for the two sisters but to "be still" and learn that God is God. This was indeed a trial of faith. Martha’s faith was not equal to sitting "still," for we read that "Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him;" but Mary "sat still in the house."

Then we see how graciously the Lord revealed Himself to Martha as "a very present help in trouble." Martha said, "I know that he shall rise again . . . at the last day." The Lord replied, "I am

the resurrection." Then Martha's thoughts travel back to what had been counseled in times past as to the Lord, for she said. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world." Her faith believed the great things the Lord will do in a day to come, and she believed in the Lord as connected with all the counsels of God in times past, but her faith was not strong enough to "be still" and believe in the Lord as the great "I am" — the present help in trouble. Have we not to confess that, too often, this is our difficulty. We can believe in the power of God put forth in times past and that His power will be manifest in days to come, but we are slow to believe that God is so truly "a very present help" that, when there is no duty to be fulfilled, we can "be still" and wait for His help to be made manifest. The Trouble.

(Psalms 46:2-3). The second and third verses describe the trouble that necessitates a "refuge," requires strength, and calls for "present help." The world, in which the godly man finds himself, is in turmoil and upheaval. The waters roar, and the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Often in Scripture the sea, in its restlessness, is used as a symbol of the nations in a state of turmoil (Isaiah 5:30). Today, can we not hear the roar of the waves as, in every part of the world we see the nations in a state of upheaval, revolution, and conflict? As a result, ancient constitutions that have existed for centuries, and established forms of government that seemed as stable as the mountains are being overthrown by the rising violence, and increasing corruption of men. Little wonder that men's hearts are "failing them for fear and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth" (Luke 21:26). But, says the Psalmist, "Therefore will not we fear," for "God is our refuge, and strength, a very present help in trouble " The way in which the faith of God's people is sustained in trouble.

What then is the secret that strengthens the people of God to pass through the terrifying conditions of the world without "fear"; that, in the presence of change and upheaval, enables them to "be still," and realise that God is "a very present help in trouble"?

(Psalms 46:4-6). First, God sustains the faith of His people by unfolding to them the secret of His purpose. In this passage the purpose of God is brought before us in the river and the city of God: "There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God."

Through all time, with its changes, upheavals, and conflicts, there flows the river of God's pleasure. No power of the enemy, no violence and corruption of men, no failure of the saints, can thwart God in carrying out His deep eternal counsels. Dispensations come and go: empires rise and fall; every testimony that God commits to the responsibility of men breaks down in their hands. But, over all, and through all, God is carrying out His purpose for the glory of Christ and the blessing of His people, earthly and heavenly.

Secondly, all the blessing that God has purposed for Christ and His people centres in the city of God. The Psalmist looks beyond the desolations of the actual Jerusalem of his day, and, looking by faith into the future, He sees the city according to the counsels of God. There rises before his vision a city of gladness, a "holy place," a city that "shall not be moved," with God dwelling "in the midst of her." So, too, in the presence of all the turmoil and confusion in the world by which we are surrounded, and the corruptions of Christendom, the believer walks in the light of the heavenly city. We see "the New Jerusalem" — a city of gladness where all tears will be wiped away, where there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain. We see, too, that it is a holy city into which nothing that defiles will ever enter; we see that it will not be

moved, for it is a city that hath foundations. Above all, we see that "God is in the midst of her," for we read "the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it." Thus our faith is sustained by the river of God's pleasure, and "the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:10).

Thirdly, the Psalmist sees that though the nations may rage against God's city, yet "God shall help her, and that right early." There is a better, and more beautiful, translation that reads, "God shall help her at the dawn of the morning" (N. Tn.). So, again, our privilege is to "look beyond the long dark night and hail the coming day." On every hand we see the nations raging, the kingdoms of the earth being overthrown — the waters roar and are troubled, and the mountains shake; but, even as the Psalmist could say, "He uttered His voice, the earth melted," so we wait to hear the voice of the Lord when He shall say, "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away." Then indeed "the dawn of the morning" will come, the day will break, "and the shadows flee away."

(Psalms 46:7). Fourthly, amidst the deepening shadows of the night, until the dawn of the morning, we can say with the Psalmist, "The LORD of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our refuge." The LORD with all power at His disposal, and the God of grace that can take up and bless a poor failing man like Jacob, is with us, and our refuge. When the day dawns we shall be with Christ in the glory of that day; in the meantime He is with us as we pass through the sorrows of the night. He "died for us that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him." Seeing "He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee, . . . we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Hebrews 13:5-6).

(Psalms 46:8-9). Fifthly, the Psalmist sees that in due time God, Himself, will deal in judgment with all the evils of the world; and after the "desolations" of judgment, He will bring in the blessings of the reign of Christ, when wars will cease unto the end of the earth. Men, by their own efforts and wisdom, through leagues, and pacts, and conferences, are seeking to bring about universal peace and introduce a millennium of prosperity without God and without Christ. The Christian who sees that his blessing is bound up with the city of God, and who knows that God will deal with the evil of this world, refuses to be linked up with man's futile efforts to end the world's unrest.

Thus, that we may be delivered from all fear, in the presence of so much that would make the natural heart tremble, we are instructed in the secret purpose of God that cannot fail. We see by faith the city of God shining before us in all its glory and beauty; we wait for the dawn of the day; and, in the meantime, we have the Lord with us to deliver us from every fear, a refuge from every storm. Furthermore, we know that in due time God will judge the wickedness of men and bring in universal peace.

(Psalms 46:10-11). Only as these great truths are held in living faith in our souls shall we be able to "be still" in the presence of the world's unrest, even as the Lord, Himself, could sleep in the storm. Our danger is that, in the presence of the increasing evils of the world, we may get over-occupied with events and lose sight of the city of God, and thus be tempted to join with men in their efforts to combat the evil. To act thus is to leave God out and seek to meet the evil by human wisdom and human power. If such efforts had any measure of success it would only lead to the exaltation of men. Our part is to "be still," and wait for God to act for His own glory, for God has said, "I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth."

Only as we are "still," shall we be kept in the blessed realisation that the Lord is "with us," "our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

H. Smith.

S. God Our Refuge

"God Our Refuge."

Psalms 46:1-11. In this beautiful Psalm we are reminded that, amidst all the storms of life, God is the refuge of His people: a deeply important truth to which all believers would assent as a doctrine, though, too often we may fail to avail ourselves of our "refuge" in meeting the difficulties and dangers of the everyday life. The Psalm opens with the statement that "God is our refuge." Again, in the course of the Psalm it is stated that "The God of Jacob is our refuge." Finally it closes by repeating, for the third time, that God "is our refuge." Clearly, then, this is the great truth that is pressed in this Psalm. Men of the world, in seeking a refuge from dangers and difficulties, wholly rely on natural and human plans. Believers, while not despising providential means, have in God an unfailing resource. Are we surrounded by dangers

"God is our refuge." Are we utterly weak in the presence of every opposing enemy? God is our "strength." Do we need help at every moment and in all our troubles? "God . . . is a very present help in trouble." In the opening verse we have, then, the great theme of the Psalm — the confidence of faith that finds in God an unfailing resource, in all the trials we may have to face as we journey through this world. In the remainder of the Psalm we learn the blessed results of this quiet confidence in God:

Firstly, it enables the believer to rise above the fear of the violence and corruption of this present world (vv. 2, 3).

Secondly, this faith leads the believer to walk in the light of the world to come (vv. 4, 5).

Thirdly, while still in a world in which the nations rage, and kingdoms are moved, faith realises that God is "with us" (vv. 6, 7).

Fourthly, faith assures us that God, in His own time and way, will deal with all the evil of the world (5: 8).

Fifthly, faith sees that God, having dealt in righteousness with the evil, will bring peace to the world. "He maketh wars to cease" (5: 9).

Sixthly, in this confidence, faith can wait in calmness for God to act, knowing that God is God, and in due time will be exalted among the nations (5: 10).

Seventhly, in the light of these great truths, faith is established in the confidence that, during the waiting time, God is "with us," and "our refuge" (5: 11).

(1) The conditions of the present world (Psalms 46:2-3). The believer realising that in God he has a "refuge," and needed "strength," and "help," can face all the violence and corruption that is raging through the world with the consequent turmoil and confusion. "The earth," as a symbol, speaks of an ordered and civilised condition. Such conditions may be removed and all ordered government become thoroughly disorganised. The mountains symbolise that which is imposing

and apparently firmly established in the earth. Great empires of the world that have endured for centuries appear to be unassailable; but again and again we see in history, even as God has foretold, that these empires have fallen and been lost in the sea of nations. The Lord can speak of the Roman Empire as a mountain "cast into the sea" (Matthew 21:21). In Scripture the "troubled sea" is often used to set forth the wicked who stir up evil and cannot rest (Isaiah 57:20-21). The "waters" are used to set forth "peoples, and multitudes, and nations" (Revelation 17:15). The roaring and troubling of the waters surely speak of the masses in a state of revolution that overthrows all authority.

If such was the condition of the world in the Psalmist's day, how much more does it set forth the violence and corruption that mark the world of our day, as we approach the end of the age. The godly man, looking at the prevailing conditions of the world, sees the utter failure of all civilisation and the breakdown of the government of the world that has been committed to the Gentiles. He sees imposing empires of this world overturned and lost amidst the masses, that rise up in revolution, so that all authority is shaken and men's hearts are failing them for fear (Luke 21:26). But if the hearts of men are filled with fear, believers, in the confidence that God is their refuge, can say, "Therefore will not we fear."

(2) The world to come (Psalms 46:4-5). Not only does faith overcome the present world, but it walks in the light of the world to come with all its peace and blessing. Faith looks beyond "the waters" of this world that "roar" and make "trouble," and it sees the river of God, and streams of refreshing that "make glad." It looks beyond the imposing cities of men and sees "the city of God." The Psalmist looked for the establishment of Zion — the earthly city — from which blessing will flow to the nations. Abraham, in his day, "looked for the city" whose "builder and maker is God." In our day, believers can say, we "are come unto mount Zion; and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem." Under present conditions we see the great cities of this world assaulted and desolated by ruthless violence and corruption. Looking on to the heavenly Jerusalem we see the city into which there shall in no wise enter "anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination; or maketh a lie," and no enemy will ever scale its wall "great and high" (Revelation 21:12; Revelation 21:27). Moreover, the Psalmist, speaking of the earthly Zion, reminds us that "God is in the midst of her." So of the heavenly city, we read "the throne of God and the Lamb shall be in it," and again, we learn that "the glory of God did lighten it and the Lamb is the lamp thereof" (Revelation 21:23). Moreover, if the cities and empires of this world are breaking up and falling into ruin, of the city of God we read, "she shall not be moved." We see that the cities of men have no righteous foundation, and are therefore marked by change and decay. But, like Abraham, we look for the city "which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." What God has founded will never be moved. No power of the enemy will assault it; no evil of man will pass through its gates; no night will ever dim its light; no shadow of death will bring any change; no curse will lead to decay. The "pure river of water of life" will for ever "make glad the city of God."

Furthermore, we have not long to wait for this city to be brought into display, for we read, "God shall help her, and that right early." The better and more beautiful translation is, "God shall help her at the dawning of the morning." Looking at the world around, we see moral darkness increasing, and the clouds of the coming storm of judgment are gathering. But the increasing "works of darkness" only assure the believer that "the night is far spent, and the day is at hand" (Romans 13:12). The dawn of the morning — the "morning without clouds" — is very near, for it is

but "a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry." For the Christian the day of glory will dawn by the coming of Christ as "the bright and morning star" (Revelation 22:16): for the world the blessing will come when Christ, as "the Sun of righteousness" will "arise with healing in His wings." Then, indeed, the clouds will be dispelled, for when the day breaks "the shadows will flee away," and the sufferings of God's earthly people will be healed (Malachi 4:2).

(3) God with us (Psalms 46:6-7). As in the days of the Psalmist, so, with yet greater intensity, in these closing days, the nations rage and the kingdoms of this world are moved. When men "rage" they act in a way that is contrary to the dictates of nature and common sense. Moved by Satan, the prince of this world, men act without reason, even as when the demons entered into a herd of swine they acted in a way entirely opposed to the natural instincts of an animal, by rushing violently to their destruction. Led by Satan, the nations today, without reason, rage against one another to their common destruction, and all the kingdoms of the earth are moved. Nevertheless, God has but to speak the word and all the raging of man will cease. Even so the disciples found when, at the word of the Lord "a great tempest" was changed into "a great calm" (Matthew 8:24-26). At the cross the nations raged and the people imagined a vain thing, only to find that God will speak unto them in His wrath and vex them in His sore displeasure (Psalms 2:1-5).

Nevertheless, whatever storms may rage amongst the nations, the LORD of hosts is "with" His people, and therefore, they can say, "the God of Jacob is our refuge." The God Who is "in the midst" of the city to which we belong (verse 5) is "with" His people on their way to the city. When Jacob was a homeless stranger, God could say to him "I am with thee, and will keep thee . . . I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of" (Genesis 28:15). The God that was with Jacob — a man of faith, in spite of many failures — has also said to believers today, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." If He is with us, He is "our refuge," and the believer can boldly say, "the Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Hebrews 13:5-6).

(4) The righteous judgment of the LORD (Psalms 46:8). If the LORD is with His people, He is against the wicked, and will bring them to desolation when He deals in righteous judgment with the nations. Then will be fulfilled the solemn words of the prophet, "The indignation of the LORD is upon all the nations, and His fury upon all their armies: He hath utterly destroyed them, He hath delivered them to the slaughter" (Isaiah 34:2).

(5) The peace of the world (Psalms 46:9). The righteous judgment of God will lead to universal peace amongst men, for, as the prophet can say, "The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever" (Isaiah 32:17). Men talk of a new order, by which they hope to end war and bring about a universal peace. But the peace of which men dream ignores both the holiness of God and the wickedness of men. It is a peace without righteousness. All the efforts of men will be in vain, for it is the LORD Who "maketh wars to cease," and His peace will be universal, for wars will "cease unto the end of the earth." Then, indeed will the Scripture be fulfilled, that tells us, "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isaiah 2:4).

(6) The patience of faith (Psalms 46:10). Knowing that God is our refuge in the midst of the raging of the nations, and that He, Himself, is about to rebuke the nations and make wars to cease, the believer is called to "Be still." The knowledge that Christ is sitting in the place of power, at God's right hand, waiting until all His enemies are put under His feet, will go far to enable the believer to

sit "still" in a world of turmoil, while waiting for the intervention of God at the coming of the Lord. Resting upon the Lord’s words, "Behold, I come quickly," the believer will keep the word of His patience, and thus "Be still" (Psalms 110:1; Revelation 3:10-11). Nevertheless, to "Be still" is a very great test for faith. The flesh is restless, and the energy of nature would ever be active. But where there is no duty to perform, our place is to be "Be still," and in patience wait for God to act in His own time and way, for His own glory and exaltation. "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord" (James 5:7-8). How often the restless activity of the flesh springs from the desire to exalt self. Man is ever active in seeking his own glory and exaltation. The believer is called to "Be still" that God may be exalted.

(7) God our refuge (Psalms 46:11). Having grace to "be still" we shall find, in our practical experience that God "is with us," and "our refuge." In the spirit of these verses, the prophet Isaiah can say, "We have waited for Thee: be Thou their arm every morning, our salvation also in the time of trouble" (Isaiah 33:2). If the Lord is "with us" in this world of conflict, it is that we may be with Him in the coming glory, for this is the desire of His heart according to His own words, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with Me where I am." (John 17:24).

How blessed then for the believer to enter into the good of this Psalm, and live in the calm assurance that, 1. God is our refuge in every storm;

2. God is our strength in all our weakness;

3. God is our help in every trouble;

4. God will deal in judgment with all the evil;

5. God will bring peace to the ends of the earth;

6. God will be exalted in the earth;

7. God is "with us" as we pass on to the glory through a world of strife, and is "our refuge." The storm may roar without me. My heart may low be laid, But God is round about me, And can I be dismayed?

H. Smith.

S. Godliness.

`"Godliness."

"His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness"2 Peter 1:3. In the Second Epistle of Peter the Spirit of God addresses believers, who, with the apostle, are marked by "like precious faith." The apostle warns us against "false teachers" that will be found in the Christian circle — as he says "among you:" and he foretells the corruption that will mark Christendom "in the last days" (2 Peter 2:1 : 2 Peter 3:3).

Let us remember that the apostle is not describing heathenism, but the condition of Christendom, in which our lot is cast, and as it exists in our times, for who can doubt that we live in the "last days." the awful condition of which is so vividly portrayed. The terrible character of this corruption is brought home to us by the illustrations and figures used to set it forth. We are carried far back to "the angels that sinned" to find a parallel to the rebellion against God of Christendom. "The world of the ungodly," before the flood, is used to illustrate the violence and corruption in Christendom. The wicked lives and "filthy conversation" of the men of Sodom and Gomorrha, are used to set forth the moral degradation that exists in Christendom. The history of Balaam is referred to as setting forth the covetous practices that prevail in these last days. To find figures that adequately set forth the return of Christendom to the conditions of heathenism, the apostle uses the figure of a dog returning to its vomit, and the washed sow to her wallowing in the mire. But there is another side to this solemn picture. The apostle not only warns us of the evil. but, for the comfort and encouragement of the believer, he shows that in the darkest moments of the last days it is still possible for the individual believer to escape the corruptions around and live a life of godliness. Moreover, he encourages us to live this life by setting before us the promises of coming glory to which the path of godliness will lead. So that we may say, the two great truths of this second epistle are, first, to set before us the life of godliness by which the believer passes on to glory; secondly, to warn us against the awful corruptions of Christendom which are leading on to judgment. A brief consideration of the way these truths are presented in the Epistle will make this clear. In chapter 1, the apostle sets before us the life of godliness (2 Peter 1:1-9), and the glory of the Kingdom to which it leads (2 Peter 1:11-21). In 2 Peter 2:1-22; 2 Peter 3:1-10, he brings before us the different forms of corruption and the judgment to which they lead. He speaks of those in the Christian profession who bring in "destructive heresies;" who deny the Lord; who pursue "pernicious (or ’dissolute’) ways:" who abandon themselves to covetousness and the lust of uncleanness: who act in bold self-will and defiance of authority: whose eyes and hearts are given over to sin; who speak great swelling words of vanity, and are the servants of corruption (verses 1, 2, 3, 10, 14. 18, 19). He further shows that all these corruptions lead to overwhelming judgment. In chapter 3, the apostle warns believers not to be carried away by scoffers, who, taking advantage by the long-suffering grace of God, pursue their lusts and deny that any judgment is coming (2 Peter 3:1-10). Having been warned of the corruption and the certainty of coming judgment we are again exhorted to live the life of godliness (2 Peter 3:11-18). By opening and closing his epistle with exhortations to godliness he emphasises its deep importance. In the same strain the apostle

Paul warns us that in "the last days" Christendom would have the form of godliness but without the power. If he presses upon us the path of separation, he also warns us, that having taken that path, to "Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, love, peace" (2 Timothy 2:19-22; 2 Timothy 3:1-5).

Protestantism judges the gross evils of Romanism and boasts of its separation from Rome. Again, Nonconformity may deplore the evils of Protestant nationalism, and separate from it: the Brethren, so-called may rightly condemn the evils of Rome, Protestantism and Nonconformity, and take the separate path; but let us remember that neither Protestants, Nonconformists, nor Brethren will escape the governmental judgment of God simply because they have separated from known evil, and that which is contrary to the truth. Unless the inner life of godliness, consistent with the outward path of separation is maintained, all outward position, however correct, will be of no avail.

If then we desire to escape the corruptions of Christendom, and live the life of godliness, we shall do well to consider the rich provision that God has made to enable the individual believer to live this life in the midst of the appalling evils of the last days.

Firstly, let us note, that the solid basis for the life of godliness has been laid in the cross of Christ. To this reference is made when the apostle speaks of "the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (1:1). At the cross the rights of God were maintained by our Saviour giving Himself a propitiation for "the whole world" (1 John 2:2). God is so satisfied, and glorified, by the Person and work of the Lord Jesus when He "offered Himself without spot to God," that now in perfect righteousness He can proclaim forgiveness of sins "through this Man" to the whole world, and pronounce the one that believes justified from all things (Hebrews 9:14 : Acts 13:38-39). At the cross the righteousness of God is satisfied; the love of God is gratified; God, Himself, is glorified; and "through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ," the believer is justified.

Secondly, we learn that not only is the believer saved and forgiven, but, being saved, God, by His divine power, hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3). We have to face the power of the flesh within, the power of the world around, and the power of the devil against us; but "divine power," which is far above every adverse power, is for us, and in this power it is possible to live the life of godliness.

Thirdly, to encourage us to live the life of godliness, we are told that connected with it are "exceeding great and precious promises." In the course of the epistle we learn that these promises connect us with the "everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," and the "new heavens and a new earth" (2 Peter 1:4).

Fourthly, there are unrolled before us the beautiful moral qualities that mark the life of godliness (2 Peter 1:5-7). The apostle speaks of "faith," "virtue," "knowledge," "temperance," "endurance," "godliness," "brotherly love," and love." We are exhorted to have these qualities together, each one affecting the other so that in result there may be an even, balanced, life of godliness.

1) Faith naturally comes first, for it is by "the door of faith" we enter into blessing (Acts 14:27): and, in our practical lives as believers, without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6).

2) In our faith we are exhorted to have virtue. Virtue sets forth moral excellence. In the first epistle we read that believers have been chosen to "set forth the excellencies of Him" who has called us

(1 Peter 2:9 N. Tn.). This is the same word in the original language that is here translated "virtue." The reality of the faith is proved by a change of life that exhibits some of the moral excellencies seen in perfection in Christ.

3) To set forth these moral excellencies we shall require "knowledge." Therefore in virtue we are exhorted to have knowledge. However true and sincere the heart may be, if there be ignorance as to the commands of the Lord there will be failure in obedience. As one has said, "A true heart is of vital importance; but an instructed mind as to what the will of God is, is needed to regulate and guide the warmest heart." May we not say that Martha's service for the Lord exhibited many excellent qualities, but it was not tempered by the knowledge of the mind of the Lord — the knowledge that Mary obtained by sitting at the feet of Jesus and hearing His word (Luke 10:38-42). We may well pray with the apostle Paul to "be filled with the knowledge of His will" (Colossians 1:9); and, again, that "our love may abound yet more and more in knowledge," in order that we may "approve things that are excellent" (Php 1:9-10).

4) In our knowledge we need temperance. In Galatians 5:23, this word is translated in the New Translation, "Self-control." The possession of knowledge, apart from self-control, may lead, as with the Corinthian saints, to our being puffed up with a sense of self-importance. We are warned that if a man seeks to use knowledge to exalt himself, that man "knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know" (1 Corinthians 8:2). How important then to judge ourselves so that with our knowledge there may be temperate thoughts of self — not thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought to think: but to think soberly (Romans 12:3).

5) With sober thoughts of self we shall need patience or endurance (N.Tn.) with others. If by grace we have a sober estimate of ourselves we may be in danger of being impatient with a self-assertive person who possibly thinks himself to be something when he is nothing (Galatians 6:2-3). All such pretensions we have to bear with patience, considering ourselves lest we be tempted.

6) Furthermore in endurance with one another we are to have godliness, or the fear of God. Otherwise there is the danger of making endurance with the weaknesses and failures of one another an excuse for passing over actual evil in ourselves or others.

7) While ever seeking to give God His place we are not to forget what is due to our brother. With godliness we are to remember to show brotherly love.

8) Lastly we are to beware lest the love to a brother may degenerate into mere partiality, or natural friendship. It is to be love after the divine pattern. With brotherly love (philadelphia), we are to have divine love (agapee).

Commencing with faith we come at last to divine love, and thus partake of the "divine nature" of which the apostle speaks in verse 4. These, then, are the beautiful qualities that make up the life of godliness.

Fifthly, having brought before us the life of godliness, the apostle, in the verses that follow, encourages us to live the life by setting before us its blessedness and warning us of its neglect. We are told that if "these things" be in us and abound, our lives will not be unfruitful. Where these beautiful Christlike qualities are found there will be fruit for God — the Father will be glorified, and

we shall be manifested as the disciples of Christ (John 15:8). Then we are warned that the lack of these things will result in spiritual blindness that cannot look afar off to the glory to which godliness leads, nor look back to the cross where all ungodliness was dealt with.

Sixthly, we are encouraged to "do these things" and thus be preserved in the present from falls, and, in the future have an abundant entrance "into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Every believer will be in the Kingdom, but only those who live the life of godliness will have an abundant enhance. Let us remember that "these things" of which the apostle speaks in verses, 8, 9, 10, 12 and 15, are the beautiful qualities that form the life of godliness. The apostle is not speaking of preaching or teaching or the exercise of gifts, which are not given to all, and which may give prominence among the saints or before the world. He is speaking of the secret life of godliness which is open to all. We all have to beware lest we form a false estimate of ourselves through any little service. Those specially who are gifted, and much before the public eye, have to beware lest amidst the excitement of constant engagements, constant preaching, and public work before men, they neglect the secret life of godliness before God. Does not Scripture warn us that it is possible to preach with all the eloquence of men and angels, and yet be nothing? That which bears fruit for God, and will have its bright reward in the day to come, is the life of godliness from which all true service must flow, and without which no amount of religious activity will carry any blessing for the soul, even if, in the over-ruling ways of God it may be used for the blessing of others (Php 1:15-18).

Seventhly, to encourage us to live the life of godliness the apostle sets before us the glory of the Kingdom to which it leads. He, and two other disciples, had been eye-witnesses of this glory on "the holy Mount." There they saw the "power and coming of our Lord Jesus, which will introduce the Kingdom. There, too, they saw the "Majesty" of Christ that will be displayed in the Kingdom. There they saw that the One Who had received dishonour and shame at the hands of men, "received from God the Father, honour and glory." Further they realised that believers will be "with Him" in the day of His glory. In the closing chapter, the apostle, still having in view the manner of persons we ought to be, marked by "holy conversation and godliness" (3:11), carries us in spirit beyond the Kingdom, where righteousness reigns, into the "new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells." To sum up the truth as to godliness, so blessedly brought before us in this portion of the Word of God, we learn: The basis of the life of godliness in the cross (2 Peter 1:1): The divine power that enables us to live this life (2 Peter 1:3): The precious promises attached to the life (2 Peter 1:4): The moral qualities that form the life (2 Peter 1:5-7): The present fruit for God that flows from this life (2 Peter 1:8): The abundant entrance into the Kingdom that the life secures; and The glory of the Kingdom and the eternal state to which it leads (2 Peter 1:11-21; 2 Peter 3:11-14). As these things pass before our souls we are made to realise the truth of the words of the apostle Paul: — "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come" (1 Timothy 4:8).

H. Smith.

S. Grace and Glory.

Grace and Glory.

Psalms 84:1-12.

Hamilton Smith.

Edification Vol. 6, 1932, page 197. This beautiful Psalm gives prophetically the latter day experiences of the godly remnant of Israel, when, delivered from their long captivity, they travel back to God’s dwelling place in Zion. The spirit of grace that breathes throughout the Psalm makes it easier, than in many other Psalms, to draw from it an application to the Christian, as he too passes on his pilgrim way to the Father’s house on high.

There are three themes which mark the three divisions of the Psalm.

(1) The beauty of the house of God, to which he is travelling, and the blessedness of those who dwell within that house (Psalms 84:1-4).

(2) The experiences in the path that lead to the house, and the blessedness of the one who treads this path (Psalms 84:5-7).

(3) The comfort of prayer, and the blessedness of the man who confides in the Lord (Psalms 84:8-12).

Thus there is brought before us a threefold blessedness. The blessedness of dwelling where God dwells: the blessedness that is found in treading the path that leads to God’s dwelling; and the blessedness of trusting in God while treading that path (Psalms 84:4-5, Psalms 84:12). THE DWELLING OF GOD. (Psalms 84:1-4). The Psalm opens with an expression of delight in the house of God — "How amiable [or how "lovely"] are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts." The godly soul sees that he is called to dwell with God, in God’s own dwelling. What makes that dwelling so lovely to the soul of the Psalmist is that God Himself is there — the living God. Everything in those courts speaks of the glory of God. There God is fully displayed, and being fully displayed can be fully known. The soul longs to reach those courts of glory, the heart and the flesh cannot be satisfied apart from the living. In like spirit the Christian looks on to the Father’s house. A house where everything speaks of God the Father. The believer finds himself in a scene of contrariety where the godly suffer; where evil is increasing, both in the world and among the professing people of God; where the will of man prevails and the glory of man is displayed; and where, to sight, there is no intervention of God — God apparently being silent and still. Nevertheless, faith knows that God lives, and faith looks on to the dwelling place of God. There it will be manifested that God is the living God, and all declares the glory of God. The home to which we are going is indeed perfect in holiness and love; but what would a perfect scene be without the One to whom the home belongs, and without Christ, the One who makes the Father known? The soul of the true Israelite realizes that the One who finds a home for the worthless bird, and a rest for the restless bird, has surely a resting place for His people — "Thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my

God." The Christian can say that God has found a resting place for His people in the accepted sacrifice of Christ — "Whom God has set forth a mercy seat, through faith in His blood, . . . to declare at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."

If, however, God has secured a solid resting place for His people in His altar, it is in order to bring His people to dwell with Him in His house. In that dwelling "They will be constantly praising Thee" (verse 4, N.Tr.). If Christ becomes the great sacrifice on the altar of Calvary, it is to secure a praising people for God in His house. The One who uttered the cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" alone could give the answer, "But Thou art holy, O Thou that dwellest amid the praises of Israel" (Psalms 22:1-3, (N. Tr.). He died to meet the holiness of God, and secure a praising people. There rises up before our vision the loveliness of the dwelling place of God — where God will dwell in the midst of a praising people, There will Thy love find perfect rest, Where all around is bliss, Where all in Thee supremely blest, Thy praise their service is. THE HIGHWAYS. (Psalms 84:5-7).

Very happily the Psalm opens with the blessedness of the dwelling place of God. ’linen it sets before us the path that leads to that dwelling place. This, too, is the way of the Lord when unfolding the truth to His disciples in the last discourses. He does not tell them of the trials by the way, and then end His discourses by presenting before them the blessedness of the Father’s house. The Lord takes a better way: He commences the discourse, of John 14:1-31, by unfolding the loveliness of the Father’s house. Before we are called to face the journey, with its trials and difficulties, we are assured of the blessedness of the home to which it leads. Like the Psalmist we take the journey through the valley, in the light of the City that is set on a hill. This journey is brought before us in John 14:5-7. In John 14:5, we are viewed as treading the highways — we are passing on. In John 14:6, we are in a valley of tears, which we are passing through. In John 14:7, Zion is in sight — we are passing in. The "highways" that lead to Zion pass through an enemy’s land. At times the way may seem long, and rough, and dreary, and the soul may long and faint for the end of the journey. Thus the very first need will be strength for the journey. This strength can alone be found m God; hence the Psalmist says, "Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee." The passage in the New Testament, that above all others, marks out the pilgrim path in an evil day, opens with the exhortation, "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 2:1). If the dwelling place of God is an object to the heart, the way that leads there, will have a place in the heart. If the pilgrim path has little attraction for our hearts, does it not tell a tale of hearts that have been little touched with the sense of the blessedness of the home on high to which we have been called. The character of the path is then brought before us. It passes through the valley of weeping (for such is the better translation). It is not simply a valley of trial, but a valley of weeping. The "weeping" speaks not merely of trials, but of the experiences in the trials. The trials, in themselves, might harden; the experiences learned in the trials — the "weeping," that expresses the deep feelings of the soul before God in the trials — become a source of blessing to the soul. The one who draws his strength from God, and brings his sorrows to God, will turn the "valley of weeping" into a "well-spring" of spiritual blessing. In the spirit of the Psalmist the Apostle can say to Timothy that he was "mindful of his tears." It was not only that he was mindful of the trials of Timothy but of the "tears" that were called forth by the trials.

Moreover, in the highway that leads to the house of God there is "the early rain" that "covereth it with blessings" (John 14:6, N. Tr.). The rain speaks of that which comes from above — all that ministry of Christ which the Spirit of God brings from above to refresh and gladden the heart. The word is really "early-rain," and refers to the soft and gentle rain that refreshes the ground in seed time (Deuteronomy 11:14). The "valley of weeping" prepares the soul to receive the gracious ministry of Christ from above.

Thus the soul, refreshed by the well-spring from beneath, and the early rain from above, passes onward from strength to strength. These words hardly imply a store of strength, to which strength is ever being added however much strength may increase. They set forth, rather, a fresh supply of strength from day to day. The assured end of the journey is that "(each one) will appear before God in Zion" (John 14:7, N. Tr.). We may, and alas! we do, break down on the journey. We may halt on the way, we may grow weary of the way, we may follow on faint yet pursuing; but in spite of all failure and feebleness "Each one will appear before God in Zion." If the Lord has said, "My sheep . . . shall never perish," we may be sure that all His sheep will reach home at last They pass on their way: one by one they go out of our sight, but "Each one appears before God in Zion." And there at last shall they meet.

Away with our sorrow and fear!

We soon shall have enter’d our home The heavenly city appear, The day of our glory have come!

All tears shall have passed from our eyes When Him we behold in the cloud And taste the full joy of the skies The love pf our Father and God. THE PRAYER. (John 14:8-12) The Psalm closes with the prayer of the godly soul who takes this path that leads to the house of God. Very blessedly he appeals to "the God of hosts" and "the God of Jacob." The Psalmist turns to God with a sense of His Divine Majesty and power as the God of hosts; and to One who has all grace, and with whom he is in covenant relationship, as the God of Jacob. With Jacob God entered into relationship on the ground of sovereign grace, and with failing Jacob all through his wanderings God showed all grace. The God of power and the God of grace, with whom we are in relationship, is the One who alone can bring us on our way to glory.

Then, in his prayer, the Psalmist expresses the ground of his confidence in looking to God, "Behold O God our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed." Who but Christ is God’s anointed? The basis of all our blessing — the ground of all our confidence — is that Christ is all that God would have Him to be, and has done all that God requires to be done, in order that His grace may flow out in blessing to unworthy sinners. God looks upon Christ as One who was anointed to do the great work, and God is satisfied with Christ and His finished work. Thus God can be a shield to the believer. He can shelter him from judgment, death, and all the power of the enemy, because of what He has found in Christ. Well, indeed, for the soul to ever plead the satisfaction that God has found in Christ, and say "Look upon the face of thine anointed." In the light of the coming glory the world, and all that it can offer is left behind. What can the tents of wickedness offer in comparison with the courts of the Lord? A day in His courts is better than a thousand spent in the most favourable circumstances in the dwellings of men. At best the world has but a temporary tent for its dwelling: the Lord brings us to an eternal home. With the God of power and grace before his soul; blessed and accepted in the Anointed; with His back on The world and his face to the glory, the believer can pursue his way in all the blessed sense that God is

a sun and a shield. He is a light to guide us in a dark world, and a shield to protect us from an evil world. Day by day, He gives the needed grace; and grace begun on earth will end in glory on high. Nothing but glory is the suited answer to His grace. The eternal weight of glory is the only adequate answer to the exceeding riches of His grace. At the start of our journey grace sought and found us, at the end glory awaits us. Between the grace at the start and the glory at the end, "No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly."

Thus assured of "grace," "glory" and every "good thing," the soul may well conclude, "Blessed is the man that trusteth in Thee." Well may we sing:- Haste thee on from grace to glory, Armed by faith, and winged by prayer, Heaven’s eternal day’s before thee God’s right hand shall guide thee there.

HAMIILTON SMITH.

S. Guidance in a Day of Ruin.

Guidance in a Day of Ruin.

Hamilton Smith.

Rehoboam

Jeremiah

Daniel

We may be assured there will never come a day in the history of the Church on earth, however dark and difficult, when there will be no light in God's Word to guide the believer who desires to walk in the path of obedience. Through ignorance or self-will we may miss the path, through lack of devotedness we may be indifferent to it, for want of faith we may shrink from it, but none the less light for the path is there for those who seek it and desire to walk in obedience to the Word.

Moreover this light will not only be found in the New Testament in the form of instruction, but will also be found in the Old Testament by way of illustration. We purpose therefore to look at three Old Testament scenes that will help us to seize the great unchanging principles of God that should guide us in the day of division and scattering among the people of God.

REHOBOAM (2 Chronicles 11:1-23)

Until the days of Rehoboam the people of Israel had been united in one kingdom; with the commencement of his reign they were divided. Does the story of this division afford any light as to the terrible divisions that have scattered the people of God in our day? We believe it does.

First we may enquire, What was the root of this division? The actual division took place in the days of Rehoboam but to discover its root we must go back to the days of Solomon. So with every division among the people of God, the true cause is often far removed from the actual division. The tenth chapter of the First Book of Kings, verses 26 to 29, together with chapter eleven, will bring before us the root of this great division in Israel. All is traced back to loss of devotedness to God, and departure from the Word of God. In order to seize the true character of this failure we must remember that the law of Moses gave very definite instructions for the King. In Deuteronomy 17:14-20, the King is warned against worldliness on the one hand, and disobedience to the Word on the other. The king was not to multiply horses; he was not to cause the people to return to Egypt, for the Lord had said, "Ye shall henceforth return no more that way." He was not to multiply wives to himself, nor greatly multiply to himself silver and gold. On the other hand he was to write a copy of the law and "read therein all the days of his life," to learn the fear of the Lord, and to keep all the words of the law.

Turning to the tenth and eleventh chapters of the First Book of Kings we find that in every particular King Solomon breaks down. He multiplies horses, he causes the people to return to Egypt; he multiplies wives to himself, and greatly multiplies silver and gold. Moreover, while much

is written of Solomon’s riches, wisdom, and magnificence, we are never told that he read the law of the Lord. Thus at length the Lord has to say to him "thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes which I have commanded thee" (1 Kings 11:11).

Here then we discover the root of division in Israel and, may we not say, the root of all divisions that have taken place among the people of God. First, unjudged worldliness that robs the people of true devotedness, and second disobedience to the Word of God.

Because of these things God tells Solomon that the kingdom will be rent in twain. We must remember, however, that the division will not be simply because of the failure of the King, but also on account of the failure of the people. When the prophet Ahijah tells Jeroboam that the Kingdom is going to be divided, he says nothing about the failure of Solomon, but speaks only of the failure of the people. The division will come says the Lord "because they have forsaken Me; and have worshipped Ashtoreth . . . and have not walked in my ways, to do that which is right in mine eyes, and keep my statutes and my judgments" (1 Kings 11:31-33).

Here again we find the root of division to be worldliness that turns aside to other gods, and disobedience to the Word of God, but now connected with the people. The folly and failure of the leaders however great would not necessarily cause division were it not for the low condition of the people of God generally. "This is done of thee" condemns the individual; "they have forsaken Me," reveals the low condition of the people, that is behind the failure of the leaders (cf. verses 11 and 33).

Such was the root of division, but how was the division actually brought about. The history is given in 1 Kings 12:1-33 and 2 Chronicles 10:1-19. King Solomon dies and his son Rehoboam comes to the throne. Immediately a crisis arises. There had been a long history of harsh actions, and grievous bondage, during the preceding years, and now a portion of the people rise up in protest. How is this met by the leader of the day? Rehoboam is counselled by the old men, who are rich in experience, that all will be well if he will "be kind to this people, and please them, and speak good words to them" (2 Chronicles 10:7). Does not this carry our thoughts to Romans 15:1-4? In the first verse of this passage we have the "kindness" that bears "the infirmities of the weak" rather than putting grievous yokes upon them; in Romans 15:2-3 we have the pleasing one another for "good to edification," rather than pleasing ourselves; and in Romans 15:4 we have the "good words" of Scripture for our comfort and hope.

Such is the spiritual advice of the old men; very different however is the counsel of nature, as given by the "young men". They advise Rehoboam to take a course which appears highly commendable to nature as taking a strong line, and as maintaining authority and the majesty of the kingdom. Alas Rehoboam follows advice of nature. He assumes an overbearing and unreasonable attitude and threatens the protesters with violent and extreme discipline (1 Kings 12:12-15). The violence of the King is met by the violence of the people who stone the King’s officer, and, in result, division is consummated (1 Kings 12:16-19).

However to judge of the division simply by the folly of Rehoboam would have been to entirely miss the mind of God. People of that day, looking at the bare facts of the case, might have concluded that the division was wholly owing to the folly of Rehoboam. They might have argued, ’Had it not been that Rehoboam took such an overbearing and unreasonable attitude, threatening to bring us

all into bondage by exercising a violent discipline upon the people of God, there would have been no division." But however reasonable such arguments might appear to the natural mind they would have been false. It was true that Rehoboam's folly was the immediate cause of the division, but the word of God in judgment had gone forth long before the violent words of the King, and the mighty hand of God in discipline was behind the feeble hand of the King. The holy government of God was rending the kingdom, and behind the discipline of God was the low condition of the people. The division having taken place, the further history of Rehoboam is exceedingly instructive, warning us of the snares to avoid, and instructing us as to the course to take, in the presence of divisions.

Rehoboam at once sets to work to bring the people of God together again, and, using the methods suited to the dispensation, he gathers together an army for this purpose. There is no question that it was in accord with God's thoughts that the people should be one. They had been one in the commencement of God's ways with them, and in the day to come they will be one according to the word of the prophet, "I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one King shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all" (Ezekiel 37:22). It might thus appear that Rehoboam was justified in his efforts to end the division and unite the people of God.

However he has to learn, and all Israel with him, that in spite of the division the ten tribes are still their "brethren," and they are not to "go up nor fight against" them. Moreover Shemaiah, the man of God, tells Rehoboam why they must desist. It is because God says "This thing is done of Me." God had rebuked Solomon for his worldliness and disobedience to the Word of God, and said to him, "Forasmuch as this is done of thee . . . I will rend the kingdom from thee." Now that the blow has fallen, God can say to Rehoboam "This thing is done of Me." To seek to undo the evil of Solomon may be right; to ignore the governmental acts of God is certainly wrong. (cf. 1 Kings 11:11 and 2 Chronicles 11:4). Rehoboam and those with him have to learn, as indeed we all have to learn in the divisions that our own folly has brought about, that the government of God cannot be lightly ignored.

Very wisely Rehoboam, and the two tribes desisted from their efforts, as we read, they "obeyed the words of the Lord" (2 Chronicles 11:4 ff). They accept the humiliation and sorrow of the division and bow under the chastening hand of the Lord.

Henceforth Rehoboam remains within the restricted sphere that the division has brought about, for we read that "he dwelt in Jerusalem." Does this however mean that he settles down to a life of quiet ease and inaction? Does he no longer concern himself with the interests of the people of God? Far from it, for at once we read he becomes a builder; he "built cities for defence in Judah" (2 Chronicles 11:5-10). As we might say in our day, he "strengthened the things that remained." Moreover he provided "store of victual, and of oil, and of wine" (2 Chronicles 11:11). He provided food for the people of God.

What was the result? Judah became a refuge for the people of God: as we read "the priests and the Levites that were in all Israel resorted to him out of all their coasts," and "out of all the tribes of Israel such as set their hearts to seek the Lord God of Israel came to Rehoboam." "So they strengthened the kingdom of Judah" (2 Chronicles 11:13, 2 Chronicles 11:16-17). For three years this prosperity continued; then alas! Rehoboam forsook the law of the Lord (2 Chronicles 12:1) and

disaster speedily followed. Had he only continued in obedience who can say how much further prosperity might have been known? Has this no voice for us in the presence of the divisions amongst the people of God in our day? Have not great efforts been put forth to end the divisions among the people of God, ending too often in adding to the confusion. Would it not be our wisdom to recognize the governmental hand of God upon us because of our worldliness and departure from the Word; to bow under the chastening hand of God; to accept the reproach and sorrow of division; to remain in quiet obedience to the Word, on God’s ground for His people, seeking to strengthen the things that remain, and feed the people of God? And would not those who in devotedness and faithfulness to the Word, resolutely acted in this way, become a refuge for the distressed people of God from every quarter?

JEREMIAH (Jeremiah 42:1-22, Jeremiah 43:1-7)

Four hundred years had passed since the great division in Israel when the events recorded in this chapter transpired. At this date we find the people of God not only divided but scattered. One hundred and thirty years before, the ten tribes had passed into captivity to become lost among the nations. Repeated captivities had thinned the ranks of Judah, until at length the kingdom, as such, had ceased to exist.

However a remnant of God’s people are still found in God’s land. In the opening verses of the forty-second chapter of Jeremiah they came to the prophet professing to seek light from the Lord for their path in the day of scattering. "All the people from the least even unto the greatest, came near." Counting, however, the least with the greatest, they have to own they are but a remnant, for they say "we are left but a few of many (Jeremiah 42:2). Their desire is, as they say, that the Lord "may shew us the way wherein we may walk, and the thing that we may do" (Jeremiah 42:3).

They recognise the ruin of the nation; they own they are but a few. In the midst of the ruin, and in confessed weakness, they meet together to enquire of the Lord the path He would have them to take and how He would have them to act. What course could be more fitting than for a little company of God’s people, under such circumstances, to turn to the Lord for guidance?

Jeremiah accordingly undertakes to pray to the Lord on their behalf, and to declare to them the Lord’s mind, keeping nothing back (Jeremiah 42:4). This leads this remnant to make the most solemn protestation, that whatever the Lord’s answer may be, they will "obey the voice of the Lord;" they rightly recognise that, doing so, it will be well with them. However dark the day, however great the ruin, it will still be well with those who obey "the voice of the Lord" (Jeremiah 42:5-6).

One thing, however, spoilt these fair words. As we shall see the after history discloses that underneath their good words self-will was at work. They had already determined to take their own course. The selfwill of the flesh betrays itself by their too self-confident protestation of readiness to obey the voice of the Lord. How often since that day has the flesh shown itself by the self-confident word that betrayed the self-will of the heart. Are there not those who say, after the manner of this remnant, "Give us Scripture — give us the word of the Lord — and we will bow to it!" We may well fear that self-will lies behind such fair words.

However Jeremiah turns to the Lord, receiving an answer after ten days. During these days apparently he has no communications with the people. He will not venture an opinion of his own,

as to the way in which they should walk and act. He will wait for clear directions from the Lord (Jeremiah 42:7). The Lord’s way is very plain. If this little remnant desire to be built up, and established; if they are to enjoy the Lord’s presence with them, and the Lord’s mercies, there is one condition they must comply with. They must "still abide in this land." However great the failure, however complete the ruin, there would still be blessing for a little remnant — a few of many — so long as they remain on God’s ground for God’s people Their King and leaders may have fled, the house of the Lord be burned to the ground, and the walls of Jerusalem be broken down (Jeremiah 52:7-8, Jeremiah 52:13), nevertheless there would still be blessing for those who remained in the land. The Land was the place for all Israel, but alas! the great mass had passed into captivity and were lost among the nations, but all blessing, for the few who remained, depended upon their still abiding in the Land (Jeremiah 42:9-12).

We may well pause in considering this story of people and events of a long past day, and ask ourselves, Has this story any lesson for those who in this present day, in great feebleness and weakness, seek to know "the way wherein we may walk, and the thing that we may do," in the midst of the division and scattering that has taken place among the people of God? Is not the great lesson this, that, however great the ruin, however divided and scattered the people of God, blessing will be found by those who still remain on God’s ground for all God’s people. In other words, the way of blessing, in spite of all failure, is still to walk in the light of what is true for the whole Assembly of God, and to refuse all other ground. No failure on our part can relieve us from the responsibility of walking and acting according to the truth of the Assembly of God whether viewed locally or collectively. The principles that should guide the Assembly still remain with all their force unfolded for us in the First Epistle to the Corinthians. It is true as one has said,

"We are not to imitate those chapters, or play the part of Corinthians, as though we had all the gifts of Corinthians. Nor are we to assume to be the only light in our place, as the Church then was at Corinth. But we must have faith to know this, that the scattering of the lights or the judgment of the candlestick is not the withdrawal of the Spirit . . . We must hold to God’s principles in the place or the scene around us . . . We are not to expect, it may be, such corporate power as would have been, had no divine judgment come upon the candlestick . . . Again as we are not to surrender principles to the corruptions around, neither are we to give them up because of some disappointing efforts in asserting them. ’Let God be true but every man a liar.’ We are not to give up principle because it is hotly assailed, neither are we to do so because it has been poorly and faintly illustrated. The principle outlives a thousand disappointing attempts to exhibit it. The light is not to be judged because of the soiled lamp through which it may shine . . . I may be grieved and disappointed that the candle has been, as it were, under a bushel, but I am to remember that it is a candle still, able to give light to all that are in the house" (J. G. B.).

Returning to the story of the remnant in Jeremiah’s day, we shall find it has warning as well as instruction for us. Having given them the word of the Lord as to the way of blessing, Jeremiah proceeds to utter the word of the Lord in the way of warning (Jeremiah 42:13-17). If the remnant say "We will not dwell in the land," we fear if we do it will mean conflict, and continual warnings by the sound of the trumpet, and possibly even lack of bread, and so we propose to leave the Land and seek escape from these things in another land, — if they speak and act thus — they are warned, that the very things they seek to escape will overtake them. Moreover, the most solemn thing of all will be, that instead of having the Lord with them in blessing, they will have the hand of

the Lord upon them in government. They shall not escape says the Lord "from the evil that I will bring upon them" (Jeremiah 42:13-17). Has this no warning voice for us today? Are we not at times tempted to weary of God’s path, and seek in some man-made system an easier path — some system in which, by the introduction of worldly principles and methods, we shall escape the continual call for the exercise of faith? Do we not at times weary of the continual conflict in seeking to maintain the truth, and shrink from being disturbed by trumpet calls as to dangers that assail; are we not tempted to say, ’if we have to continually face conflict we fear we shall suffer spiritual starvation?’ Are we not thus at times fiercely assailed by the tempter to give up God’s truth for God’s Assembly? In the presence of such arguments, whether arising in our own hearts. or whether suggested to us by others, let us remember the warnings of the Lord to the remnant of Jeremiah’s day.

Firstly, to take a false step to escape trouble is the surest way to fall into the trouble we seek to escape. To leave God’s ground to escape the difficulties of the path of faith, will entangle us with the world and overwhelm us with difficulties in the path of selfwill. Secondly, the remnant are warned that those who take such a path will fall into reproach, and "see this place no more" (Jeremiah 42:18). It is a solemn consideration that those who have walked for a time in the light of the truth for God’s Assembly, and have then given it up for an easier path in some man-made system have seldom if ever been recovered. They "see this place no more." When God in His government says "no more" there is an end of the matter.

Alas! those to whom Jeremiah spoke refused the instruction, and heeded not the warnings of the Lord. Jeremiah is not ignorant of the reason. He says, "Ye dissembled in your hearts," or according to a better translation, "Ye deceived yourselves in your own souls" (Jeremiah 42:20). The self-will that was determined to take a certain course deceived them. Nothing will so warp the understanding, and hinder the apprehension of the truth as self-will. It will not see what it does not want to see. And, as ever, behind the self-will there was pride that would not admit they were wrong, as we read, "All the proud men" came to Jeremiah saying, "Thou speakest falsely: the Lord our God hath not sent thee to say, Go not into Egypt to sojourn there" (Jeremiah 43:3).

Moreover they tell Jeremiah that he is not governed by the word of the Lord, he is simply repeating man’s word. They practically say, We asked you for the word of the Lord, and you have simply told us what Baruch says, and if we follow what you say it will simply bring us all into bondage (Jeremiah 43:1-3).

Thus with hearts deceived by self-will and pride they turn from the instruction of the Lord and miss His "way." They leave God’s ground for His people, take a path of their own choosing, and "see this place no more." Would we know "the way wherein we may walk, and the thing that we may do" let us obey the Lord’s word and "abide in this land." Let us take heed to His warning, lest turning aside to some other path we too "see this place no more."

DANIEL (Daniel 9:1-27) The abandonment of God’s land by the remnant of Jeremiah’s day, completed the scattering of God’s people. Fifty years passed away and then God intervenes in His grace and grants a revival, under which a few of His people are set free from the captivity to return to the land. The experiences proper to those affected by this movement and the principles that should have guided them are set forth in the prayer and confession of Daniel. And therein we shall find much that is instructive to those who in our day have been set free from the systems of men to

walk in the light of Christ and His Assembly. The day in which we live is dispensationally very different to the day in which Daniel lived, and yet morally there is much that corresponds between the two periods. In the first place, Daniel, in his day, could look back over one thousand years of failure amongst the professing people of God, for in his confession he goes back to the time when God brought Israel out of Egypt, and from that time he says, "We have sinned, we have done wickedly" (Daniel 9:15).

Secondly, in the seventh and eighth chapters of Daniel he is permitted to look into the future and still he sees that failure and suffering await the people of God. He sees that the Gentile powers would make war against the saints and prevail against them; the daily sacrifice would be taken away; the truth would be cast down to the ground; the sanctuary trodden under foot; and that the enemy would prosper and destroy the mighty and holy people (Daniel 7:21, Daniel 8:11-13, Daniel 8:24).

Thirdly, he sees there will be no deliverance for God's people from this long history of failure, until the Son of Man comes and sets up His kingdom (Daniel 7:13-14).

Thus Daniel, in his day, sees the past marked by failure, the future dark with predictions of deeper sorrows and greater failure, and no hope of deliverance for the people of God as a whole until the King comes. In the presence of these things Daniel was deeply affected, his thoughts troubled him, his countenance was changed, and he fainted and was sick certain days (Daniel 7:28, Daniel 8:27).

We can hardly fail to see there is that which corresponds to these experiences of Daniel in our day: for we too look back over nearly two thousand years of failure amongst the professing people of God, and we too have learned that the little while that may yet remain, will be marked by increasing failure amongst the professing people of God. "In the last days," says the Apostle, "difficult times shall come," "evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse;" again he says, "the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine . . . they shall turn away from the truth." Peter also warns us that "There shall be false teachers" among the people of God, who "privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them." Furthermore the third thing that Daniel saw is equally plain to us, for we also see from Scripture, that there will be no recovery for the people of God as a whole, until Christ comes. But this is not the only correspondence between our day and that in which Daniel lived. For Daniel made another discovery. He learned from Scripture that, in spite of all past failure, and in spite of all future disaster, God had foretold that there would be a little reviving in the midst of the years. He discovers by "the word of the Lord" to Jeremiah that after seventy years there would be some recovery from the desolations of Jerusalem. So we have learned from Scripture that in the midst of the corruptions and deadness of Christendom, as set forth in Thyatira and Sardis there would again be a revival in the midst of the years as set forth in Philadelphia. This revival has four outstanding characteristics, for to Philadelphia the Lord says, first "Thou hast a little strength." second, Thou "hast kept My word;" third, Thou "hast not denied My name;" and fourth, "Thou hast kept the word of My patience." In a day when religious flesh is displaying itself in power as great Babylon, those under this revival would be marked by a position of outward weakness; when on every hand the Word is being belittled, they keep the Word in its purity and integrity; and when the Person of Christ is being attacked, they do not deny His Name. Moreover, when men are making

desperate efforts to heal the divisions of Christendom, they keep the word of His patience. They wait the coming of Christ to heal the divisions and bring His people together in His presence.

Now obedience to the Word and the refusal to deny the Name of Christ will involve a great deal. To those who obey the Word, and give Christ His place it means the recovery of the truth of Christ and His Church, the heavenly calling, the coming of Christ and other related truths.

Moreover such are exposed to the constant danger of giving up the truths that have been recovered, and hence the warning to such is, "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown," and the exhortation is to "overcome."

How then are we to "Hold fast," and how are we to "overcome?"

It is evident we can neither "hold fast" nor "overcome" in our own strength. We can only "hold fast" and only be overcomers, as we are strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Hence we must look to the Lord, and this calls for prayer. Then if we pray to the Lord, if we seek His grace, it is necessary that there should be a moral condition suited to the Lord, and this calls for confession. And in respect of these two things, prayer and confession, we can learn much from Daniel. As we have seen he had looked back, and he had looked on and as he saw the condition of things amongst the people of God he was greatly distressed, and in his distress he did two things: — First he looked away from man to God, as he says in Daniel 9:3, "I set my face unto the Lord God" to seek Him by prayer. Second, not only did he pray, but he adds, I "made my confession" (Daniel 9:4).

Now mark the result of this prayer and confession. The first result of turning to God is that he gets a great sense of the greatness, holiness and faithfulness of God. Man is very small, and Daniel may be fainting but the Lord is "great." Moreover he realises that God is true to His word and that if only His people will cherish His Name — if they will love Him — and keep His Word, in spite of all their failure they will find mercy. The second result of turning to God, in prayer and confession, is that he gets a deep sense of the total ruin of God’s people. He recognises that the low condition of God’s people lies at the root of all the division and scattering that has come in amongst the people of God. He does not seek to place the blame for the division and scattering upon certain individuals, who may indeed have acted in a high-handed manner, and have perverted the truth and led many into error; but, looking beyond the failure of individuals he sees and owns the failure of God’s people as a whole. He says, "We have sinned," "Our kings, our princes, our fathers, and all the people of the land" (Daniel 9:5-6). Personally Daniel had no direct part in bringing about the scattering that had taken place seventy years before, but the absence of personal responsibility, and the lapse of time, does not lead him to ignore the division and scattering or seek to place the blame for it upon individuals long since passed from the scene; on the contrary he identifies himself before God with the people of God; he says "We have sinned." In the history of Israel the people failed and in their low condition insisted upon a King, then the kings led them astray. So in the history of the Church. In the third and fourth chapters of 1 Corinthians the Apostle Paul traces all division back to the low carnal condition of the people that led them to range themselves under certain leaders; and the Apostle foresees that after his decease leaders would arise that would bring about open division, for he can say, "I know that after my decease . . . of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them."

Hence it would appear that the root of all division whether in Israel or the Church, can be traced back to the low moral condition of God's people as a whole, and not simply the wrong doing of individuals. Hence true confession must have in view all the people of God. Daniel does not think of one city only, (though that city may have taken the lead in failure), but, with Jerusalem, he links "all Israel;" nor does he confine his thoughts to all Israel that may be "near" at hand, for he takes in all "that are near and that are far off" (Daniel 9:7). With this example before us we may well ask what should be our great aim in confession and humiliation? Should it be simply that the breaches might be healed? Surely not — this must be left in the hands of the One before whom we have so grievously failed. Our end should be that we might be restored morally to the height of our calling from which we have departed. A third result of Daniel's prayer and confession is that he recognises the hand of God in government upon His people. He lays hold of this deeply important principle that when division and scattering have occurred these evils must be accepted as from God. acting in His holy discipline, and not simply viewed as brought about by particular acts of folly, or wickedness, on the part of individual men. This is clearly seen in the great division that took place in Israel. Instrumentally it was brought about by the folly of Rehoboam, but says God, "This thing is done of Me" (2 Chronicles 11:4). Four hundred and fifty years later when the people of God were not only divided but scattered among the nations, Daniel very clearly recognises this great principle. He says, "O Lord righteousness belongeth unto Thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries whither Thou hast driven them." Then again he speaks of God "bringing upon us a great evil," and yet again, "the Lord watched upon the evil and brought it upon us" (Daniel 9:7, Daniel 9:12, Daniel 9:14). Thus Daniel loses sight of the wickedness and folly of individual men. He mentions no names. He does not speak of Jehoiachin or "his abominations which he did," nor of Zedekiah and his folly, nor does he refer to the ruthless violence of Nebuchadnezzar, but, looking beyond all men, he sees, in the scattering, the hand of a righteous God.

Thus too a little later Zechariah hears the word of the Lord to the priests, and all the people of the land, saying, "I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they knew not" (Zechariah 7:5, Zechariah 7:14). So too Nehemiah, later still, in his prayer recalls the words of the Lord by Moses saying, "If ye transgress I will scatter you abroad" (Nehemiah 1:8).

There is no attempt with these men of God to modify their strong statements of God's dealing in discipline. They do not even say that God has "allowed" His people to be scattered, or "permitted" them to be driven away, but they plainly say that God has driven the people away and brought the evil.

Fourth, another great principle that flows from turning to God in prayer and confession is, not only that we recognise God's hand in dealing with us in discipline, but, that we have turned to the One who alone can gather and bless His people. So that in the acknowledgement of God's hand in discipline lies the only hope of any reviving or any measure of recovery, for in setting our faces toward God we are looking to the One who can not only divide but unite, not only scatter but gather, not only break up but heal. (Hosea 6:1). Man indeed can scatter, and divide, and break up, but he cannot again gather and unite, and heal. God can do both and do both righteously. This is clearly seen in Daniel's confession, for he says, "O Lord righteousness belongeth unto Thee . . . Thou hast driven them etc;" then again he says, "The Lord watched upon this evil, and brought it

upon us: for the Lord our God is righteous in all His works which He doeth" (Daniel 9:7, Daniel 9:14). Then for a third time he appeals to the righteousness of God; but this time it is to bless and shew mercy, for he says, "O Lord according to all thy righteousness, I beseech Thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away" (Daniel 9:16).

Daniel bases his appeal upon the fact that however much the people might have failed, and God may have had to discipline them, yet they are His people. It is, says Daniel, "Thy city Jerusalem," "Thy holy mountain," "Thy people" that are in reproach, "Thy Sanctuary that is desolate," and it is "Thy servant that prays" (Daniel 9:16-17). Then he pleads that the blessing might be granted ’for the Lord’s sake" (Daniel 9:17). Thirdly, he pleads the Lord’s "great mercies;" and finally, he pleads the Lord’s Name, for he says, "Thy city and Thy people are called by Thy Name" (Daniel 9:19).

Here then we have portrayed some of the great principles that should guide us in a day of confusion and ruin.

First, to turn to God in prayer and confession, and in His presence to get a fresh sense of His greatness, holiness, and mercy to those who are prepared to keep His word (Daniel 9:3-4).

Second, to confess our failure and the totality of our ruin (Daniel 9:5-15).

Third, to recognise and own the righteousness of God in dealing with us in His government (Daniel 9:7, Daniel 9:14-15).

Fourth, to fall back on the righteousness of God that can act in mercy and grant some reviving.

S. His Desire Is Towards Me.

His Desire Is Towards Me.

Hamilton Smith.

Extracted from Scripture Truth magazine, Volume 8, 1916, page 5. Does this lovely utterance of the bride in the Song of Songs give expression to any experience that we have ever known in the secret of our soul's history with the Lord? The bride could not always have spoken thus. There came a day when the vision of the Bridegroom filled her soul: when, for the first time, realizing something of the preciousness of His love, and the sweetness of His name she exclaims, "Thy love is better than wine," and "Thy name is as ointment poured forth" (Song of Solomon 1:2-3).

He became something to her, but was she anything to Him? This was the question that weighed upon her heart. She knew something of her deep need "I am black because the sun hath looked upon me": she knew something of His deep perfections, for she could say, "Behold, thou art fair, my Beloved" (Song of Solomon 1:16). Her heart went out in longing to Him, but was it possible that One so fair could have any affection for one so black? The desire of her heart finds expression in her request "let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth." If He loves me let Him give me the token of His love. And then, in the progress of her history, there came a time when she heard the voice of her Beloved: "My Beloved spake and said unto me, rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away" (Song of Solomon 2:10) It was the personal call of the Bridegroom. He answers the longing of her soul. He lets her know that He has longings after her. He will not be without her: "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away" (Song of Solomon 2:13). And at once the glad response is drawn from the bride, "My Beloved is mine, and I am His" (Song of Solomon 2:16). It is true she has some sense that she belongs to Him, but the uppermost thought in her heart is, I have an interest in Him; He is mine; ''MY BELOVED IS MINE."

But, in the progress of the Song of Songs, the bride passes through other and varied experiences, leading her into a deeper acquaintance with her Beloved. For a season the Bridegroom withdraws Himself, leaving the bride in darkness and alone (Song of Solomon 3:1-2). The bride seeks her Beloved but cannot find Him. In vain she searches the city, He is not there; in vain she inquires of the watchmen, they cannot help her. But when she has passed them by, — when other helpers fail, then He discovers Himself to her in all His glory as the Bridegroom and the King. She sees the King crowned with glory and honour, but she sees the Bridegroom "in the day of the gladness of His heart" (Song of Solomon 3:4-11). And having revealed His own glory, He declares all that the bride is in His sight: "Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee" (Song of Solomon 4:7). But alas, in spite of this wonderful unfolding of His thoughts toward His bride, her heart grows slothful, resting content in the assurance of His love. She fails to respond to His voice, and He withdraws, but only to reawaken yearnings of heart after Himself. If affections were dull in His presence, He will awaken them by His absence. She opens to Him, but He is gone: she seeks Him, but He cannot be found: she calls to Him, but there is no answer. In the city she is only exposed to sorrow and shame; her Beloved is not there. But the absence of the Bridegroom has kindled afresh all her

affections; her heart is longing to declare His glories. Her companions inquire, "What is thy Beloved more than another?" And at once her heart overflows with His praise. He is "the chiefest among ten thousand.... He is altogether lovely" (Song of Solomon 5:10-16.). Her heart is filled with His glories, her lips tell forth His praise. He rises up before the vision of her soul. No longer is there need to seek Him; she knows where He is: "My Beloved is gone down into His garden" (Song of Solomon 6:2); she has found Him, and engrossed with the glories of the Bridegroom she exclaims, "I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine" (Song of Solomon 6:3). Time was when her first thought was, "My Beloved is mine," He belongs to me; but now her first thought is, "I AM MY BELOVED'S," I belong to Him. But blessed as these experiences are she has yet to make a deeper acquaintance with the heart of the Bridegroom. The vision of the Bridegroom had filled her soul, and she had witnessed to others of His glories (Song of Solomon 5:9-16), but now she is to taste the far deeper joy of hearing from the lips of the Bridegroom the thoughts of His heart about her: "Thou art beautiful, O my love," "How fair and how pleasant art thou" (Song of Solomon 6:4; Song of Solomon 7:6).

She tells others what the Bridegroom is in her sight, but He tells the bride what she is in His sight. In secret He pours into her ear all the delight that she is to Him. He would have her to know, not only how beautiful she is in His sight, but how precious she is to His heart: "My dove, my undefiled is but one, she is the only one" (Song of Solomon 6:9). Others there may be, but none can compare with the bride in His sight. At once her heart responds with an outburst of joy, "I am my Beloved's, and His desire is toward me" (Song of Solomon 7:10). Time was when she could say, with great delight, "My Beloved is mine"; then, as she ripens in acquaintance with Him, she says, "I am my Beloved's"; and finally, lost in wonder, as she hears from His lips the unfolding of the depths of His love to her, she exclaims, "I am my Beloved's, and HIS DESIRE IS TOWARD ME." And does not every true believer know something of these experiences? Can we not look back to a time when, realizing our deep need, and something of the love and grace of Christ, we were drawn to Him? And yet, as we thought of the blackness of our hearts the question would arise, "Can it be possible that He loves me — even me?" And we longed to get some assurance of our personal interest in Christ: and then in answer to all these longings — for He satisfieth the longing soul — there came a day when, as we sometimes sing, "I heard the voice of Jesus say, Come unto Me and rest."

We heard the voice of the Beloved — the voice of the Son of God — calling us to rise up from this poor world and come away. We heard Him say, "The winter is past, the rain is over and gone"; that the storm that was over our heads had burst upon His head — His thorn-crowned head. And as we looked by faith upon the risen Saviour all our fears were dispelled, like those of the disciples of old, as they heard Him say, "Behold My hands and My feet." Beholding those wounds, the witness of His death, the glorious truth was borne in upon our souls, "He loved me, and gave Himself for me." We could say at last, He is my Saviour; "My Beloved is mine."

How good to have the happy assurance that "Jesus is mine." But He would lead us on into a deeper knowledge of His thoughts to us-ward. He would have us begin at the cross, but He would not have us stop there. As with the disciples, He would establish our hearts with the story of the cross, telling us by the wounds in His hands and feet of a dying Saviour; and as with those same disciples, He would have us to pass on in our faith, and receive the wonderful message of the risen Saviour when He said to Mary, "Go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My

Father, and your Father; and to My God and your God." He would have us know that not only He is our Saviour, but that we are His brethren; His Father our Father, and His God our God. And as this message lays hold of our souls we can say, with great delight, "I am my Beloved's."

How good to know that I belong to Christ, and Christ is mine. But is this all? We have received great benefits from the Lord, forgiveness, justification, the gift of the Spirit, shelter from judgment and a title to glory, and we can truly say, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits." But is this all the Lord had in view when He took that great journey from the throne in heaven to a cross on earth? Was it only for this that He who was rich became poor? Only for this that the Creator of the worlds became a stranger in the land? Only for this that He wept in the garden, and suffered on the cross? Was there no deeper, greater longing in His heart than just to confer benefits upon you and me? Indeed there was, and we wrong His great heart of love when we measure the greatness of His thoughts toward us by our poor thoughts of Him.

If we would know His thoughts toward us, we must look back before ever the earth was, before a single created being had a being; then in that great eternity He looked through time into an eternity beyond, and saw a great company of people according to the purpose of His own heart, and, beholding them, He could say, "My delights were with the sons of men." And when He came into time, it is blessedly true that He healed our sicknesses and set the captive free; that He fed the hungry and clothed the naked; that He forgave our sins and raised the dead: all this He did, but He did more. Not only He met our needs, but beyond everything else He won the hearts of those whose needs He met. He attracted poor sinners and attached their hearts to Himself. He gave them to know that not only He was their Saviour, not only that they belonged to Him, but that His desire was toward them. His desire is toward us, and therefore He became a poor Man, a lonely Man, a weary Man, and a thirsty Man to win our hearts. His desire is toward us, and therefore He suffered, bled and died to make us like Himself. His desire is toward us; and therefore is He coming again to receive us unto Himself that where He is we may be also. He seems to say, "I want you; I can dispense with your riches, your abilities, and even your service, but I cannot do without you. I want you so much that I became a poor Man to win your heart; I want you so much that I died to make you like Myself; I want you so much that soon I am coming for you to have you with Myself." And as we enter into His thoughts toward us, well may we each exclaim, with great delight, "I am my Beloved's, and His desire is toward me."

How good, as I pass through a world of sin and sorrow, death and judgment, to be able to look up to the Man in the glory and say, "He is my Saviour."

More wonderful still as I pass through a world of dangers and snares on every hand, to be able to look up to the Saviour at the right hand of power, and say, "I am His." But most wonderful of all to be able to say, "There is a home in the glory that awaits me, and a Man in the glory that wants me." "His desire is toward me." He wants me so much that in the days of His flesh He wept for me and prayed for me, He suffered for me, and died for me; and all the days of my journey He is living for me; and soon — very soon — He is coming for me. And not till He has me with Him, and like Him, will the desires of His heart toward me be satisfied. But when all the redeemed are gathered home and His "new name's imprinted on every sinless brow," then shall we realize in a deeper, fuller way that His desire is toward us, and "He shall see of the fruit of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied."

"Sing, my soul! He loved thee, Jesus gave Himself for me."

Chapter 25

S. Hold that fast which thou hast.

"Hold that fast which thou hast."

Hamilton Smith Publisher’s Note When "Hold That Fast Which Thou Hast" by Hamilton Smith was first published in the early 1930s, it was sub-titled "A brief consideration of present exercises, arising from recent statements as to the revelation and relationships of Divine Persons." These "recent statements" had reference to teachings given currency amongst the "London" party of the Exclusive Brethren. It was in June 1929, at a large gathering of brethren in Barnet, England that James Taylor Senior brought forward publicly the denial of the Eternal Sonship of Christ with the words "I do not know that there is such a term in Scripture as eternal sonship." In reply to S. J. B. Carter’s remark, "I thought that in incarnation He took up in new conditions a relationship that had ever existed in eternity and that as the Son of God it was the relationship in a new condition," J. T. stated, "I think you are asserting too much in saying the relationship ’had ever existed’." Other developments soon followed, and C. A. Coates gave his name and lent his pen to this denial with his "Personal and Mediatorial Glory of the Son of God" and "Remarks on a pamphlet by A. J. Pollock entitled ’The Eternal Son’." In 1932 a corruption of the "Little Flock" hymn book appeared which expunged all mention of Christ as the "Eternal Son" and "Eternal Word." All remaining in this fellowship had to subscribe to these views, and it was thus constituted a sect to enforce error concerning the Person of Christ.

Hamilton Smith believed that error concerning the Person of Jesus, the Son of God, went beyond the bounds of sect and party, and so examined these statements in the light of Scripture. Since that time the "Taylor" brethren have been scattered far and wide, and the errors concerning the Person of Christ have also spread beyond the bounds of that party. This pamphlet is reprinted for those who may still have "present exercises" on these questions. Hamilton Smith’s conclusion is still valid that individuals and meetings should firmly refuse to have fellowship with any who hold or teach error as to the Person of Christ.

"Hold That Fast Which Thou Hast" was originally published by the Central Bible Truth Depot. It has been re-typeset with only minor changes in punctuation and emphasis. Quotations have been carefully checked with the original sources. Those in italics, which the author is controverting, are mainly found in the "Remarks" by C. A. C. published by the Kingston Bible Trust. References have been added to the quotations in bold type in favour of the Scriptural views the writer is defending.

Hamilton Smith is best known for the books and pamphlets he wrote on various portions of Scripture, mainly of a devotional and expository nature. Some had a wide circulation in his lifetime, and many have since been reprinted. A list is appended for reference at the back of this volume. They are increasingly in demand, and some have been translated into French, German and Dutch. However, Mr. Smith could also "earnestly contend for the faith once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 1:3). He would have agreed with the words found in J. N. Darby’s handwriting "I hold it vital to hold the Sonship before the worlds. It is the truth."

"Hold That Fast Which Thou Hast."

All will have to concede that, throughout the past centuries, the great body of intelligent Christians have tenaciously held that the eternal Sonship of Christ is a foundation and vital truth. It is true that from time to time individuals have arisen who have denied this great truth, as for instance the commentator Adam Clarke, in the early part of the last century. Also, amongst Brethren, individuals have, on a few occasions, ventured to deny the eternal Sonship of Christ; but these denials have hitherto been promptly disavowed by their brethren, and strong protest against this error has been raised by leaders such as the late J. N. Darby, J. G. Bellett, and C. H. Mackintosh.

Alas! today, Christians are compelled to face the fact that once again this ancient error has been revived, and that in a very pronounced form, amongst those who have always assumed to be well versed in the things of God.

Hitherto we have been instructed, and firmly believed that Scripture taught, that what came to light, through our Lord Jesus Christ becoming incarnate, was the full revelation of Divine Persons in their subsisting relationships — the Father being declared to be the Father from all eternity, and the Son to be the eternal Son, and the everlasting Word.

Now it is being taught that these Names, and the relationships they represent, can only be applied to Divine Persons since the Incarnation.

These views, apparently, have been discussed by a few individuals in a private way for some years past. It was, however, only in June 1929, in a large gathering of Brethren at Barnet, that they were publicly asserted. On that occasion the statements made were confined to the Person of our Lord. It was asserted that the term "eternal Sonship" is not found in Scripture; that while the titles "Son" and "the Word" imply the Deity of Christ, yet we cannot give names to, or define relationships between Divine Persons, before Incarnation. Further, it was said that the passages in Scripture that speak of the Father sending the Son do not mean that the Son was sent before He became flesh, but that, having become flesh, He was sent as in Manhood; and that they refer to His actual entrance into service. In correspondence that arose as to these assertions it was stated that, at Barnet, eternal Sonship was neither denied nor affirmed, but simply that Scripture says nothing about relationships between divine Persons before Incarnation; therefore that it becomes us to be silent where Scripture is silent.

Since then, the statements as to these holy matters have become much more definite. The eternal Sonship is no longer left as something we can neither affirm nor deny. It is now plainly denied, and arguments are used in the endeavour to prove that not only there is no such expression as "eternal Sonship" in Scripture, but that Sonship could not exist before Incarnation. Furthermore in the same way, it is denied that the Word is the everlasting Word.

Moreover, these denials are not even confined to the Person of the Son. It is now boldly stated that the Father was not the Father before the Incarnation. It is said, to quote the exact words, "We know Him now as the Father, but it would be misleading for us to say that He was always the Father;" again, it is said, "It is quite beside the mark to say that 'the Father was the Father before the Lord Jesus was born into the world.'" A similar line of argument is used in attempting to prove that Jehovah was not Jehovah before the revelation of the Name of Jehovah in Exodus 6:1-30. It is said that "'Christ' and 'Christ Jesus' are used in speaking of Him in the past eternity, but we all

know that He was not actually the Anointed Man then." Then this writer applies this argument to Jehovah, for he goes on to say, "We see a similar use of a Divine Name in the Old Testament. The Name Jehovah was not made known until Exodus 6:1-30, but Moses, as knowing that Name, continually uses it throughout the book of Genesis in relating circumstances which took place long before God was known by that Name." Here the argument is that as the title "Christ" is used in speaking of Christ in days when actually He was not yet the Christ, so the Name Jehovah is used in speaking of God in days when He was not yet actually Jehovah. In a word this writer suggests that Jehovah was not Jehovah before He was revealed as such.

Thus, while the Deity, and distinction of Divine Persons in eternity, as well as in time, are maintained, it is nevertheless asserted that the Names, the Father, the Son, and the Word, with the relationships that they imply, are only true of Divine Persons after Incarnation.

It seems impossible to avoid the solemn conclusion that it is asserted, First, that The Father was not the Father before Incarnation.

Second, that The Son was not the Son before Incarnation.

Third, that The Word was not The Word before Incarnation.

Fourth, that Jehovah was not Jehovah before the revelation of His Name as Jehovah to Moses. This then is the extreme way in which this old error has been revived. One of the most serious aspects of this revival is the solemn fact that it is no longer confined to a few individuals; it is adopted by a considerable body of Christians. A whole community of Christians have committed themselves to ideas that the godly of all ages have hitherto refused as being serious error concerning the Person of Christ. In any community of Christians individuals may arise teaching perverse things, or who act in an independent way. But these teachings and actions raise protest, and are neither endorsed nor followed by those with whom they are professedly in fellowship.

How different, alas! is the case in this recent revival of error. It cannot be pleaded that these errors are simply the views of one or two individuals, which those with whom they are in fellowship refuse. On the contrary, among the Christians where these views are held there has been a carefully organised effort by means of a subsidized press to promulgate and defend these views. Further, by means of a revised hymn book, altered to exclude the thought of the eternal Sonship, or the everlasting Word, this particular community of Christians has been compelled to give public and collective sanction to these errors. These efforts have been so far successful that the leaders feel safe in boldly asserting that this teaching has now been propounded long enough for all to see it, and therefore to refuse it can no longer be treated as a sin of ignorance, and those who refuse it should now be regarded as transgressors. By such means these views are forced upon a whole body of Christians, each one of whom is faced with the alternative of professing to accept these views, or else being treated as a transgressor.

Apparently to these views all must subscribe, who would remain in this fellowship. By the adoption and enforcement of these views those within this fellowship have plainly constituted themselves a sect, and that of the worst kind; for they are not a sect to maintain a truth, or even to oppose an error, but a sect to enforce error touching the Person of Christ.

It is obvious that no community of Christians can lay claim to the exclusive possession of any truth, and least of all truths that touch the Person of our Lord. Thus the questions at issue go far beyond the bounds of sects and parties. Anything touching the holy Person of Jesus, the Son of God, directly affects every one that loves Him.

It behoves us then to examine these statements, and refuse all that is contrary to sound doctrine; above all to turn to Scripture desiring that our souls may be confirmed in "those things which are most surely believed among us." May we then, in a spirit of dependence examine these views in the light of Scripture. THE WORD The Gospel of John opens with the sentence, "In the beginning was the Word." No Christian would question that this profound statement sets forth the eternal existence of the Divine Person who is called the Word. Some, however, are now saying it is incorrect to speak of the "everlasting Word." They affirm that neither the expression, nor the idea it conveys, is found in Scripture. It is asserted that the statement, "In the beginning was the Word," does not mean that in the beginning He was the Word; for, they say, it is only in Incarnation that Christ actually became the Word, and therefore this statement is limited to mean that the One who became the Word, and was known as such in time, existed in the beginning. In the endeavour to substantiate these statements three main arguments are being used.

First, it is being taught that the title "the Word is an appellation under which the disciples spoke of the Lord. It was how they apprehended Him." No evidence is adduced to support this assertion. We have incidents recorded in Scripture in which the disciples spoke of the Lord amongst themselves as "the Teacher," as "the Lord," and as "the Lord Jesus," but we can find no recorded case in which they referred to Him as "the Word." Moreover, the Lord, Himself, tells us how His disciples spoke of Him, for He says, "Ye call Me the Teacher, and the Lord" (John 13:13, N. Tr.); but He never said, "Ye call Me the Word." This strange assertion seems derogatory to the One who inspired the Apostle John to write one of the most sublime passages in the Bible, as it would suggest that the Holy Spirit was dependent, for the title He uses, upon man’s apprehension of Christ, rather than God’s revelation of Christ.

We may be sure that if John uses this appellation it is not because the saints in the early ages used it, or even apprehended its deep meaning, but because he was inspired to use the only title that suited the great truths of the opening verses of the Gospel. We may be equally certain that if the disciples of the early days ever used this appellation it was because this title was already used by the inspired writers of Scripture.

Second, it is boldly stated that "it is to be noted that while the titles ’Son,’ ’Jesus,’ ’Christ,’ ’Immanuel’ are given to Him formally by God, ’the Word’ is not." It is difficult to understand how those, who doubtless believe in the full verbal inspiration of Scripture, could make such a statement, seeing that the Spirit of God formally gives our Lord this title in the opening verses of the Gospel of John.

Third, in order to deny that the title "the Word" and "the Son" apply to our Lord Jesus before Incarnation, it is being said that "Divine Names and titles, when known, are used in Scripture to identify the Persons without necessarily meaning that they were so known in the conditions referred to." As an illustration of this statement it is said, "’Christ’ and ’Christ Jesus’ are used in speaking of Him in the past eternity, but we all know that He was not actually the Anointed Man then." This argument, we submit, is only true in connection with titles that apply to Christ in

Manhood; it becomes a wholly false argument when applied to titles used to designate Divine Persons in the Godhead. Surely it must be so; Divine Persons cannot change with the passing ages. We see in Scripture that there has been a progressive unfolding of Divine Persons, and different Names are revealed suited to each dispensation, but each Name by which a Divine Person is declared, must be a revelation of what ever has been, is, and ever will be true of the Person so revealed.

Accept this simple and obvious truth, and at once it becomes clear that the Word must be the everlasting Word. None can read the opening verses of the Gospel of John without seeing that it presents Christ in the personal glory of His Deity. As such He is entitled "the Word." As the Word He is the revealer of God — the Person in the Godhead who is in Himself the sum-total of the thoughts of God, as well as the One who, by His acts, and what He became, gives expression to those thoughts.

John instructs us that the Word is an eternal Person - "In the beginning was the Word": that He is a distinct Person — "the Word was with God:" that He is a Divine Person — "the Word was God:" lastly, that He was eternally a distinct Person — "the same was in the beginning with God."

Then, the glory of His Person being declared, we learn the two great ways in which God has been expressed through the Word. First, in Creation (verse 3); and second, in Incarnation (verse 14). Thus we read of the Word that, "All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made." We may well ask, if the Word is the Divine Person through whom God is expressed, how could God have expressed Himself in Creation if the Word did not become the Word until after the Incarnation? Scripture, however, is very plain, the Word was there, for we read, "In the beginning was the Word."

Let us listen to the words of a Christian scholar: "It is not said that in the beginning He was, in the sense of then coming into being (egeneto), but He existed (en). Thus before all time the Word was. When the great truth of the Incarnation is noted in verse 14, it is said — not that the Word came into existence, but that He was made (egeneto) flesh — began so to be."* {*Lectures Introductory to the Study of the Gospels, by W. Kelly, page 410. Available from the publisher.}

We are told "In the beginning was the Word." We never read "In the beginning He became the Word." We learn that there came a time when He became flesh: we never hear of a time when He became the Word. When all that has a beginning began, He was, — the everlasting Word. THE SON For the unfolding of the great truths concerning the eternal Son, and the relationships between the Son and the Father, we must turn to the Gospel and Epistles of John; the Epistle to the Colossians; and the Epistle to the Hebrews. As we have seen, the Gospel of John opens by presenting the personal glory of the Lord as the Word. In verse 14 historical Christianity begins. Here we read, the Word became flesh. At once this leads to a further unfolding of the Personal glory of Christ, for the Apostle speaks of Christ as "the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father." The form of this sentence does not imply that the Son only commenced to be in the bosom of the Father in Incarnation, but rather that he does not cease to be there by reason of Incarnation. He ever was, and still is in the bosom of the Father. It is true He left the glory and has now gone back into glory as Man, but He never left the Father’s bosom.

Here to transcribe the words of the late William Kelly, "It is no longer a question of nature, but of relationship; and hence it is not said simply the Word, but the Son, and the Son in the highest possible character, the only-begotten Son, distinguishing Him thus from any other who might, in a subordinate sense, be son of God. 'The only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father.' Observe: not which was, but 'which is.' He is viewed as retaining the same perfect intimacy with the Father, entirely unimpaired by local or any other circumstances He had entered. Nothing in the slightest degree detracted from His own personal glory, and from the infinitely near relationship which He had had with the Father from all eternity.... Under all changes, outwardly, he abode as from eternity the only-begotten Son in the bosom of the Father."* {*Lectures Introductory to the Study of the Gospels, by W. Kelly, page 421. Available from the publisher.} The personal glory of the Son with the Father, cannot be dependent upon a human genealogy, the virgin-birth, or His perfect youth. Hence these details, so precious and perfectly in place in the Gospel of Luke, would be entirely out of keeping with the great purpose of the Gospel of John. His personal glory must indeed add lustre to the place He has taken, the path He has trodden, and the work He has accomplished. But nothing that He became, no earthly glory that He inherits, can add to, or detract from, His personal glory as Son. Being His personal glory it must of necessity be eternal. The glory of His Person must ever remain unchanged and unchangeable from eternity to eternity. If the exact words "the eternal Son" are not found in Scripture, the truth of Eternal Sonship shines out in every page, and underlies every truth, in the Gospel of John.

Passing to Colossians 1:15-17, we have brought before us the proper glory of His Person as the Son before the world was. Very blessedly He is spoken of, in JColossians 1:13, as "the Son of His love" — the One of whom John speaks as "the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father." This is the highest character of His personal glory from which all else flows. It is as being the Son of the Father's love that He is perfectly able to make known that love. In Person He is the Son and thus able to represent God; but He becomes Man in order that men may have the living representation of the invisible God. If, however, He becomes Man, of necessity He must have the place of pre-eminence — the firstborn of all creation; and the reason of this preeminence, we are told, is that He is the Creator. By Him - the Son — all things were created. We do well to recall the words of the late J. N. Darby, who, writing of this passage, said, "The Son is here presented to us as Creator, not to the exclusion of the Father's power, nor of the operation of the Spirit. They are one, but it is the Son who is here set before us. In John 1:1-51 it is the Word who creates all things. Here, and in Hebrews i., it is under the name of Son, that He, who is also the Word, is revealed to us. He is the Word of God, the expression of His thought and of His power. It is by Him that God works and reveals Himself. He is also the Son of God; and, in particular, the Son of the Father. He reveals God, and he who has seen Him has seen the Father. Inasmuch as born in this world by the operation of God through the Holy Ghost, He is the Son of God. (Psalms 2:7; Luke 1:35) But this is in time, when creation is already the scene of the manifestation of the ways and counsels of God. But the Son is also the name of the proper relationship of His glorious Person to the Father before the world was. It is in this character that He created all things." *

{*Synopsis of the Books of the Bible, by J. N. Darby, Vol. 5, page 15 in reprint of Morrish edition. Available from the publisher.} In the opening verses of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Spirit of God again brings before us the glory of the Person of the Son. God has spoken to us in the Person of His Son. Again we are told that the Son is the Person by whom God made the worlds, and He is

the express image of His being. All the glory of God shines forth in Him. Moreover, from this passage we learn, according to Psalms 2:1-12, that as born in time Christ is declared to be the Son. If the first verse speaks of the relationship between the Son and the Father in eternity, the fifth verse tells us of the relationship between the Son and God in time — a position and relationship acquired by the miraculous birth. Though the Person is the same, and the title Son of God tells us, as surely as the title the Son of the Father, that He is a Divine Person; yet, as born into this world He is viewed as entering the relationship in a new way in Manhood, so that God can say, "I will be to Him a Father, and he shall be to Me a Son." The point in the verse is the relationship in which He is with God and not specifically His eternal relationship with the Father, for, as it has been pointed out, these words are also applied to Solomon (2 Samuel 7:14; 1 Chronicles 17:13).

Again and again, Scripture brings before us the glory of this divine Person as the eternal Son. The Father has decreed "that all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father." Alas! men take occasion by His becoming Man to belittle His glory as a Divine Person. Hence the pains the Spirit of God has taken to record in Sacred Writings the varied ways in which His personal glory as the Son is maintained.

If He comes into the creation we are reminded that He is the Son by whom all things are created.

If He is born of Mary, we are told that, "that holy thing" conceived by the power of God, was to be called "the Son of God."

If He becomes flesh and dwells among us full of grace and truth, at once we learn that He is the only-begotten Son which dwells in the bosom of the Father.

If He goes into death, we learn that, by the power of life in Him, He is declared to be the Son of God by resurrection from the dead.

If He ascends to glory as a Man, at once He is proclaimed to be the Son of God (Acts 9:20).

If in that place of glory He serves His people as the Great High Priest, we are reminded that it is the Son who is consecrated a priest for evermore (Hebrews 7:28).

If He comes to judge as Son of Man, we are also reminded that he is the Son of the Father to whom all judgment is committed (John 5:22).

Thus in these varied ways and seasons, eternity and time, Creation and Incarnation, resurrection and ascension, bear witness to the glory of the eternal Son. THE FATHER When this modern revival of an old heresy, that denies eternal Sonship, was first advanced at Barnet, nothing was said that directly denied eternal Fatherhood. It was, however, at once felt that this would inevitably follow. Seeing that the terms "Father" and "Son" are co-relative it was recognised that if we cannot affirm Sonship before Incarnation, neither can we affirm Fatherhood. As we have seen this further denial has now been definitely asserted. "It is quite beside the mark," we are told, "to say that 'the Father was the Father before the Lord Jesus was born into the world '." The Scriptures clearly show us that there has been a progressive unfolding of the names of God in the Old Testament. To Abraham He was declared as the Almighty; to Israel as Jehovah. With the opening of the Christian era we have the full revelation of God; hence baptism is to be to "the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Further, in Millennial days God will be known as the Most

High.

While, however, the revelation is progressive there can be no change, no advance, in the nature of, and the relations between, Divine Persons. In Exodus 33:18, Moses longs for a full manifestation of God. He says, "I beseech Thee, show me Thy glory." In reply he is told that the goodness of the LORD should pass before him, and the name of the LORD would be proclaimed. But he is also told, "Thou shalt see My back parts: but My face shall not be seen." The face speaks of the full disclosure of a person. The time had not yet come for the Son to declare the Father, or for the Son to be sent. All that had hitherto been declared — the back parts — Moses is permitted to see and appreciate, but the "face" could not at that time be revealed. Nevertheless, the face was there. The Father was there but awaited the coming of the Son to be revealed. Can we admit the thought that Divine Persons are dependent upon Incarnation in order to enter upon the sweet and hallowed relationships of Father and Son! Incarnation can add nothing to Divine Persons as such, or to the relationships that exist between them. The relationships must be as eternal as the Persons.

Christians have hitherto believed, and taught, that the many Scriptures that speak of the Father giving, and sending, the Son, as well as those which speak of the Son coming from the Father, definitely imply that the Father was the Father, and the Son was the Son, before Incarnation, and outside this world. Now we are asked to believe that these Scriptures do not mean that "He was sent before He became Man, but sent as in Manhood." In support of this interpretation of these passages, John 17:18 is quoted, "As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world." It is argued that this cannot mean that the disciples were sent from "another place literally," but as not being of or in the world morally, they were sent into it for testimony. Applying a similar interpretation to the passages that speak of the Son being sent, gets rid, so far, of the thought that there was a Father to send, or a Son to be sent, before Incarnation. Is this, however, a just interpretation? Would a simple and sincere soul thus read Scripture? Have the godly, and instructed saints, throughout the ages, so interpreted these Scriptures? Is it not forcing a peculiar interpretation to make Scripture support a particular theory? The late J. N. Darby gives the denial to such an interpretation. Writing on the verse, "The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world," he says, "There was a living Person there who said He was sent. Nor was it merely when in this world, that He was sent for He says, 'I came forth from the Father, and came into the world; and again I leave the world and go to the Father'" John 16:28).* In this passage the Lord definitely speaks of coming from a Person, and that Person the Father, and coming into a literal place — this world, which He again leaves to return to the Father. Thus the Lord's own words interpret for us the force of the passages which speak of His being "sent," and "coming" from the Father.

{*Notes and Comments on Scripture, from the note books of J. N. Darby, Vol. 2, page 281 in present reprint. Available from the publisher.}

John, in his Epistle, speaking of eternal life, tells us that the life that has been manifested in the Son down here is such a life as was "with the Father" — a life lived in eternity in the enjoyment of relationships between Divine Persons. The One who had lived this life throughout eternity "with the Father" was, for this very reason, the only one who could exhibit this life down here amongst men. Into this life we are brought — not indeed in the relationships of the eternal Son with the Father,

but in the relationship of sons with the Father, the place and relationships in which Jesus was seen as Man down here. The statements of John imply, as a truth beyond question, that the Father was the Father, and the Son was the Son before Incarnation. Otherwise the words of John have neither force nor meaning. To surrender this great truth is to let go the foundations of all truth. As J. N. D. has said, "The ground of the truth is that the Son had come forth from the Father and come into the world, and that He left the world and went to the Father. This was a declaration of incalculable importance .... It was laying the foundation of the whole of eternity; the full revelation of the Father and of the Son."*

{*The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby, edited by William Kelly, Vol. 33, page 273 in present reprint. Available from the publisher.}

Moreover, the denial that the Father was the Father, and that the Son was the Son before Incarnation, robs the soul of the immensity of the love that led the Son to come into the world. As Mr. Darby so truly observes, "This it is that makes the notion of sonship in Christ only when incarnate so destructive to the very elementary joy of the Church, and abhorrent to those who have communion by the Spirit in the truth."*

{*The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby, edited by William Kelly, Vol. 3, page 89 in present reprint. Available from the publisher.}

JEHOVAH A brief reference to the false use that is being made of the Name Jehovah will suffice. As already stated, it is being said that "The Name Jehovah was not made known until Exodus 6:1-30, but Moses, us knowing that Name, continually uses it throughout the book of Genesis in relating circumstances which took place long before God was known by that Name." A concordance will show that the Name Jehovah occurs one hundred and ninety-five times before Exodus 6:3. Without question, in the majority of these cases, Moses uses the Name in reporting the circumstances that took place. But the writer of the above appears to have overlooked the fact that, on occasions, Moses reports not only circumstances, but the exact words used by God, by Angels, and by the Patriarchs and others, in which the Name Jehovah occurs.

God said to Abraham, "I am Jehovah who brought thee out of Ur," and again, "Is anything too hard for Jehovah?" (Genesis 15:7; Genesis 18:14). The Angel said to Hagar, "Jehovah hath heard thy affliction;" to Lot, "Jehovah will destroy this city" (Genesis 16:11; Genesis 19:13-14). Abraham speaks of "Jehovah the God of heaven" (Genesis 24:7, Genesis 24:40). Jacob says, "Surely Jehovah is in this place" (Genesis 28:16, Genesis 28:21; Genesis 32:9).

These and other passages clearly show that Exodus 6:3, by no means implies that God was not Jehovah before that time; nor even that He was not known to be Jehovah; but, rather, that He was not known in the character of that Name in relation to the Patriarchs. To them He revealed Himself in the character of the all-preserving One - the Almighty, before Whom they were to walk (Genesis 17:1; Genesis 35:11). So today Christians know that God is the Most High, and will be known in that character in a day to come; though in the meantime they are in relation with God as the Father.

One error leads to another. The attack on the truth of the Eternal Sonship has led to serious errors concerning the revelation of God, both as the Father and as Jehovah.

How truly the late C. H. Mackintosh wrote, "The Person of Christ is the living, divine centre round which the Holy Ghost carries on all His operations. Let slip the truth as to Him, and you are like a vessel broken from its moorings, and carried, without rudder or compass, over the wild watery waste, and in imminent danger of being dashed to fragments upon the rocks of Arianism, infidelity, or atheism. Question the eternal Sonship of Christ, question His Deity, question His unspotted humanity, and you have opened the floodgate for a desolating tide of deadly error to rush in. Let no one imagine, for a moment, that this is a mere matter to be discussed by learned theologians — a curious question — a recondite mystery — a point about which we may lawfully differ. No; it is a vital, fundamental truth, to be held in the power of the Holy Ghost, and maintained at the expense of all beside — yea, to be confessed under all circumstances, whatever may be the consequences."* Does it not look as if these warning words were almost prophetic of what is coming to pass in our days? Are not those who have revived, and as a company adopted, this old error, under the misnomer of "fresh light," in danger of drifting on to the rocks of modernism?

{*Notes on the Pentateuch, by C. H. Mackintosh, page 295 in present one-volume edition. Available from the publisher.} The question forces itself upon the mind, How is it that from amongst those who have, in common with others, inherited such a rich ministry of truth, from faithful men of God, there can arise a company of people who can be so easily swayed by every wind of doctrine and led into such serious errors?

History, which so often repeats itself, may help to answer this question. Nearly one hundred years ago it came to light that the late B. W. Newton was holding and teaching deadly error as to the Person of Christ, in an Assembly of Christians at Plymouth. This error, however, was preceded, through a course of years, by a gradual departure at Plymouth from Scriptural principles, the record of which we have in the "Narrative of Facts" by the late J. N. Darby. In his account Mr. Darby speaks of the existence at that time of a system in which there was "The unsettling the souls of saints in everything precious and even vital."

He shows that under this system the gospel was neglected, and even slighted. He writes, "The gospel had been formally sent away from Ebrington Street [the Meeting Room, Plymouth], and teaching substituted for it .... It was said in so many words that they did not want the gospel — it was a bad sign to wish for it; they ought to be going on to more complete knowledge." As to the teaching, Mr. Darby remarks it "was not exactly unorthodox teaching, but important truths dealt with in so rash and daring a manner, and the authority of the teacher leant upon for them, and his wildest notions put upon the level of certainty with justification by faith; so that were his authority once shaken there would be danger that no one would know what was certain. It would be scepticism as to everything. So have I seen it with Roman Catholics."

Again, he says, "The one undeviating object seemed to be to teach differently from what brethren had taught, no matter what, so that it set their teaching aside."

Again, as to stopping the Word of God being read in Meetings, Mr. Darby says, "Some read a chapter in the Bible sometimes. This was stopped as hindering the ministry. " As to ministry, Mr. Darby says, It was not taught that "the Holy Ghost resides only in teachers," but it was "that the Holy Ghost wrought in the body by members, and that these members were the gifted teachers;" and though it was not a gift to pray or give out a hymn, "only gifted persons would take part in either." Of such a system, Mr. Darby says, "The activity and zeal will be for the system. It will be to

make proselytes, and establish them in what will keep them there, not to save souls or lead them on in Christ. There will generally be a good deal of acting against or depreciation of others who even hold the faith of Christ .... Paramount importance will be attached to the views which distinguish that institution, not to what saves or to what brings faith to the test by the revelation of Christ."

"Connected with this is the pressing much certain doctrines when it is safe, which form the bond of the institution, and denying them in the alleged meaning, or explaining them away, when they are pressed on them by those who detect the evil."

"Another mark is the extreme difficulty of fixing them to any definite statement, save as they have power to enforce it; and then it is bound on others; and there is the sternest rejection of all who do not bow."

It would seem almost impossible for anyone, who is conversant with what is taking place in our day, not to see that the same evil principles are at work, which were exposed by Mr. Darby nearly one hundred years ago. We know, alas! how it ended at Plymouth in an attack on the Person of Christ, finally leading to a division among the people of God. Alas! are not the same principles leading to the same end, for what are the statements that are being made as to the denial of eternal Sonship but an attack on the Person of Christ, whatever those who make these statements may profess? History repeats itself: "new light" is too often only "old error." There is nothing new under the sun.

Moreover, the evil at Plymouth, and its modern outbreak amongst a community of brethren, is only a repetition of the evil that first showed itself at Corinth, and that, through the ages, has wrought sorrow and division among the people of God. At root it is unjudged flesh, manifesting itself in the exaltation of man. This came out at Corinth in two ways: first, the Corinthian believers were exalting gifted servants of the Lord into a false position as leaders of parties: second, they were seeking to exalt themselves by attaching themselves, as followers, to well-known servants. In attempting to make Paul, and Apollos, and Cephas (names used as figures), the leaders of parties they fell into the evil of clericalism; in forming parties round gifted servants they fell into sectarianism; while those who said, "I am of Christ" fell into the grossest spiritual pretension; such were attempting to make Christ the Leader of a party, that used the Name of Christ to ignore the gifts that Christ had given. It was the assumption of superior spirituality that professed to be able to dispense with the ministry of others, while assuming to exclusively appropriate Christ to themselves. In Acts 20:29-30, the Apostle traces the Corinthian evil a further stage. In Corinth he speaks of what existed in his day; at Ephesus he warns us of what would occur after his decease. In Corinth he shows that the evil commenced with the disciples; at Ephesus he warns us that the trouble will arise from the leaders. One evil leads to the other. The evil that commences with Christians forming parties round leaders, ends with the leaders teaching perverse things.

History has shown that again and again people have ranged themselves round favourite teachers, and the teachers, thus placed in a false position, have eventually taught false doctrine, and broken up the people of God. When appreciation of the ministry degenerates into adulation of the minister, the result is as disastrous for the leader as for the led.

Perhaps one of the most damaging results to souls, of exalting a leader into a false position, is that what the teacher puts forth, whether truth or error, is very largely accepted because he says it. So that where such conditions prevail the searching question arises, How much of the truth itself is really held in faith with God?

We are not to despise prophesyings, nor are we to receive everything that presents itself, even if professedly given by the Spirit, but to "prove all things," and "hold fast that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:20-21). If the truth ministered is proved by Scripture, and held in faith with God, we shall not waver in our convictions with every wind of doctrine. As J. N. D. has remarked, "One is not ever learning the truth of that which we have learnt with God." Again he has remarked, "If I do not believe the Word till it be sanctioned by someone else, I do not believe it at all; it is the sanction I believe." When, however, the teacher is exalted into a false position, and we accept what he says because he says it, without putting it to the test of the Word, we are in danger of being led into perversions of the truth, and losing the truth we once professed to hold.

How else can we explain the humiliating fact that a whole body of Christians can so lightly adopt new ideas that entirely contradict teaching that for long years they held to be vital truth. So truly is this the case that whereas at one time they excommunicated a brother for denying the truth of eternal Sonship, they would now treat him as a transgressor if he asserts that truth. This revival of an old and serious error touching the Person of our Lord, is only another proof that, in common with all others, saints gathered to the Lord's Name have broken down in responsibility. It may be that one reason for the allowance of the present distress is to force upon us the conviction that all have failed to maintain the truths so graciously revived to us in the last century. The break down is our common shame. If there are still any that have not broken down collectively, then the ruin of Christendom is not yet complete. Is it not, however, manifest that all have failed, and that our only hope is to own our failure and thus take the place where God can meet us in His mercy?

Taking the lowly place shall we not find that the Word of God gives light as to the path of those who mourn over the failure, and desire to be faithful to God? Does not the story of the remnant, unfolded in Luke 1:1-80 and Luke 2:1-52, afford us instruction? In these godly individuals we see the representatives of a remarkable movement of God, whereby numbers of His people had been delivered from captivity, and brought back to God's land. There they had once again set up the altar, rebuilt the House of God, and reared the walls of the city for the protection of the House. Alas! this movement, that commenced so brightly under the guidance of the Spirit, entirely failed in the hands of man. From the prophet Malachi we learn that by his day corruption, oppression and indifference, were found amongst those who had been so favoured by God's delivering grace. When the New Testament day opens, divisions such as the Pharisees and the Sadducees, are found in their midst. Yet in spite of all this failure there were still those who feared the Lord.

How, we may ask, did the godly act in the midst of the failure? Did they suggest that it would be better to abandon the position they had taken in God's land, and once again join the mass of God's people still in captivity? Did they seek to gather together all those who feared the Lord, in order to form a new and concrete fellowship of the godly? Did they remain where they were, simply accepting the low condition, and surrendering the principles, and promises of God?

They did none of these things. They did not return to their brethren in captivity: they did not seek to start any fresh movement: they did not acquiesce in the low condition, nor surrender the truth of

God. How then did they act? Let us reply in the words of another who writes as follows: — "The few devoted ones of Luke 1:1-80 and Luke 2:1-52, were evidently of the excellent of the earth, and there was everything in their environment to make their hearts grieve and mourn. But though acquainted with each other, they did not seem to detach themselves from the existing institution. It must have seemed to their spiritual minds, formed in affection for, and set upon the Lord's Christ, a very terrible thing to be face to face with so much insincerity and emptiness in the temple regime and the public services. But if it grieved them to the quick, it does not seem to have induced any cessation of the only institution for which they had divine warrant; Anna departed not from the Temple, but served with fastings and prayers night and day. She was separate in heart, and the eye of the Lord must have rested with Divine complacency upon her and her companions, even though they were sometimes in the crowd with others. There was nothing to boast of: they knew each other, even in the midst of the masses of Israel; for she spake of Him to all them that waited for the redemption of Jerusalem. Yet there is no mention of any separate meetings for themselves. That they met with each other, and perhaps often did so, seems obvious; and found mutual comfort in so doing. But otherwise they would realize the sorrow of the general condition of Jehovah's people; perhaps the fastings and the prayers are a token of this. And the fact that they waited for redemption is evidence that they knew how far the existing conditions were from God's purpose for them" (W. H. Westcott).

These suggestive thoughts clearly show that this godly remnant remained in God's land, clung to that which God had instituted, surrendered no Divine principle, walked according to the Word, mourned over prevailing conditions with prayer and fasting, spake often one to the other, served God, and waited for the coming of Christ.

Here, however, a word of caution may be necessary; for a hasty view of the history of this remnant might lead to the question, Have we then been wrong in separating from the religious sects and systems of Christendom? A little thought should show that the question arises from a mistaken view of the position of this remnant. Let us remember that the remnant were connected with that which had been instituted, and sanctioned by God. Whereas the great religious systems of our day were never instituted by God nor sanctioned by His Word. As a result of a very definite movement of God in the last century, the truth of the Assembly was recovered for His people. In accord with this recovered truth we have, in obedience to the Word, left the systems of men, which in their constitution, and practice, are in so many ways a denial of the Assembly. Thus we find ourselves with those, who, in much failure and feebleness, seek to walk in the path marked out by God for His people in a day of ruin (2 Timothy 2:1-26); and who in this path seek to act in the light of the Assembly, according to the principles of God for the ordering of His house. We thus seek to walk in the light of the Assembly as constituted by God and according to the principles which have the sanction of His Word. Alas! like those of Malachi's day we have entirely broken down; but, like them, we are not connected with the break up of that which is essentially false, but rather with the breakdown of that which is in principle true.

Under these circumstances we see no indication by analogy of Scripture, by the leading of the Spirit, or by the general trend of exercise, that would indicate the formation of a fresh concrete fellowship. Our natural thoughts might hanker after such, in the hope of finding a company free from things that grieve the spirit, but any such attempt is, it is feared, fore-doomed to failure.

While, however, it would seem right to refrain from efforts to commence some fresh movement, is it not possible for individuals, and local meetings, to avoid both the dangers into which the children of Israel fell? On the one hand, the independency under which every man does that which is right in his own eyes (Judges 21:25): on the other hand, the opposite extreme in which all is made to depend on a leader, who "may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles" (1 Samuel 8:20). Seeking to avoid these two extremes, which in different ways set aside Christ as the Head of His Body, can we not seek to give Christ His place as the unfailing resource of His people? And so doing, will it not be the only right course for such individuals, and meetings, to firmly refuse to receive any who hold, or teach, error as to His Person; and further decline to extend fellowship to, or have association with individuals or meetings, that, after all entreaties have definitely committed themselves to independent ground? Would it not then be possible to pursue our way in dependence upon the Lord, without surrendering any truth or divine principle? Again to quote the apt words of another, who writes, "One thing stands out very clearly. We may not whittle down the height of the calling; we may not knowingly annul any part of the whole truth of Christ. The Levites were to carry the tabernacle through the wilderness, and not a peg nor a rope nor a single utensil was to be missing wherever they camped. We may not sacrifice one single principle of God’s truth, nor ignore one of His ways. That we shall be conscious of our failure, our grievous failure, and shall be covered with shame and confusion of face — this goes without saying. But recovery is to God’s standard in all its fulness. Solomon’s golden shields were soon forfeited, and brass ones took their place in Rehoboam’s day. But when Christ comes in, as recorded in Isaiah 60:1-22, and recovery is found, the standard is maintained, and we read, ’For brass I will bring gold.’ God’s standard can never be given up, though the coming of Christ Himself be the only way in which God’s purpose will be absolutely realized." The same writer has said, in words which we may well take to heart, "Let each one very definitely refuse to countenance that defilement in his own environment which is inconsistent with the holiness of God, and look out for the company of any saint who likewise seeks grace to be free for God’s will and pleasure; and their joint prayer and exercise and service may be one means God will use for saving others with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. Oh! let us not be of those who imagine that to come out from denominations and to repudiate a sectarian name is the same thing as being gathered to the Name of our Lord and being assured of His presence. The latter — His presence — can only be connected with the condition of being gathered to His Name; and that implies the self-judgment in the individual which leads to the removal of all defilement. Jehovah’s presence might not be associated with defilement in the days of old: nor can the Lord’s presence be enjoyed where defilement is allowed today" (W. H. Westcott). The common exercises of brethren, in different groups, are undoubtedly drawing individuals together, for which we may be thankful, even though such exercises go no further at present than "They that feared the Lord spake often one to another." For the great coming together of all His people we must wait the day, so soon to come, when we shall see Him "face to face." Then, indeed, His people will see "eye to eye," and "together will they sing" (Isaiah 52:8). In closing it may be timely to remind ourselves that, while we are told to "earnestly contend for the faith," we are warned against contending with our brethren. If we have to meet opponents let us beware of any bitterness of feeling towards individuals. Bad feelings towards a brother may well be checked, as one has said, by asking oneself, "How should I feel if I met this brother going in at the door of heaven?" The Spirit of Christ would lead each one to say, "I would like to think of individuals here, as I shall think of them there, without a trace of

malice, with a love that appreciates all that is of Christ in each one, while refusing all that is of the flesh."

It may be that those who stand for the truth, and desire to walk in the old paths, will be treated with scorn, for it is still true that when "truth faileth .... he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey" (Isaiah 59:15). Nevertheless, in the presence of hard speeches it is best to be silent, and bear them, casting all upon God, and praying even for those who make them. May we have grace to judge the root of sectarianism so natural to every heart; to refuse the spirit of Laodicean self-complacency that boasts in spiritual riches; and beware of a mere Pharisaical separation that exalts self while treating others with contempt. Above all may it be our earnest desire so to walk, that we may have the Lord’s approval, so that, in spite of having but a little strength, He may be able to say of us, "Thou... hast kept My word, and hast not denied My Name."

HAMILTON SMITH

S. In His Steps.

In His Steps.

Hamilton Smith.

"Follow His steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth: Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously. " (1 Peter 2:21-23).

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

While the Lord Jesus Christ is the great theme of all Scripture, yet every several portion presents some special aspect of His Person or work. The above passages bring before us, very blessedly, the lowly grace that marked His pathway of suffering as the perfectly subject Man. In one passage we are exhorted by the Apostle Peter to follow His steps: in the other, believers are invited by the Lord, Himself, to learn of Him. Good for each one to heed the exhortation and to respond to the gracious invitation. To do so however, we need to reverently enquire: What are His steps that we are exhorted to follow? and, What is it that the Lord would have us to learn of Him?

1 "HIS STEPS" (1 Peter 2:21-23.)

First, let us listen to the exhortation of the Apostle. There came a day in the history of Peter when the Lord had said to His restored disciple, "Follow Me" (John 21:19). Now the Apostle passes on these words to each one of us, as he says, "Follow His steps." In Christendom, and even by true believers, the words "Follow His steps" are often used in a vague and loose way. Even unconverted people will seize upon these words, misusing them to convey the false thought that if men carry out the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount they will be very good Christians, and thereby secure the salvation of their souls. Probably those who speak thus lightly about following His steps, would be at a loss to turn to the Scripture where the exhortation is found, and even so would prefer their own interpretation of the words rather than enquire the meaning with which they are used by the Holy Spirit.

Turning to the passage in which the exhortation occurs, we at once learn from the context that these words are addressed to believers — those of whom the Apostle can say that they have received the end of their faith even the salvation of their souls (1 Peter 1:9). It is evident then that in this Scripture there is no exhortation to a sinner to follow His steps in order to obtain salvation. Apart from the sacrificial death of Christ, and faith in His precious blood, there can be no salvation for a helpless sinner. In Scripture God never uses "His steps" to set aside His work. The exhortation to "follow His steps" is then addressed to believers, and moreover, is used with a very distinct meaning. What this meaning is we learn from the four distinct steps that are set before us. It is evident that a great deal that the Lord did in His marvellous life we cannot, and are not asked to, do. He did mighty works, even to raising the dead; He spake as never man spake. In these

ways we are not exhorted to follow His steps. The four steps we are exhorted to follow are possible for all believers, from the youngest to the oldest.

First, we are reminded that He "did no sin." We know that He went about doing good; and, in this same Epistle we are exhorted, again and again, to "good works," and to "do well". Here, however, the exhortation takes a negative form; we are to follow His steps in this respect that He did no sin. Whatever happens, whatever circumstances may arise, whatever rebuffs we may have to meet, whatever wrongs we may have to suffer, whatever insults we may have to endure, we are to do no sin. It is comparatively easy to do good as a benefactor, meeting the needs of others; but, seeing we have the flesh in us, it is at times difficult to do no sin. It is a greater thing to do no sin in trying circumstances than to do good in easy ones. The Lord was perfect in all circumstances, and, whatever the circumstances we have to meet, our first care should be to follow His steps, and maintain His character, in this respect, that we do no sin. It is better to suffer wrong than sin; better to lose your coat than let go the character of Christ.

Secondly, we read, "neither was guile found in His mouth." However sorely tried by wicked men, no question that He asked, no answer that He gave, no word that fell from His lips, was ever marred by any trace of guile. Alas! with us, at times, malice and envy may lurk behind words that are "smoother than butter" and "softer than oil." With Him no evil motive was ever hidden under fair speech. Guile lurked behind the apparently innocent question of the religious Pharisees when they asked "Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not?" for we read they were seeking to "entangle Him in His talk" (Matthew 22:15-18). With the flesh in us it is all too possible to seek to entangle one another with smooth speech and innocent looking questions. Alas! we can even covertly attack one another in the very words we address to God in public prayer. How good then, and necessary the exhortation to follow in His steps of the One in whom no guile was found in His mouth.

Thirdly, we are reminded that the Lord was One, "Who when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not." In the presence of insults, false accusation, and malicious charges, He remained silent. When falsely accused before the Jewish Council, He "held His peace." To the accusations of the Jews, in the presence of Pilate, "He answered nothing." To Pilate, himself, "He answered never a word." The mocking Herod may question Him in many words, "but He answered him nothing" (Matthew 26:63; Matthew 27:12, Matthew 27:14; Luke 23:9). How good for us to follow in His steps and, in the presence of of the malicious words of men, come from what quarter they may, to keep silence. From other Scriptures it is clear that the Christian may "entreat," "exhort," and even "rebuke," but never is he to revile or threaten.

Fourthly, He "committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously." To do no sin, to speak no guile, to keep silence in the presence of malicious words, have a negative character. This last step is positive. If we keep silence in the presence of insults, it is not that there is no answer to evil and malice, but rather that the answer is left with God. We are never to attempt to take vengeance upon the wrongdoer. God retains all vengeance in His own hands. He has said, "Vengeance belongeth unto Me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge His people" (Hebrews 10:30). Our part then is to follow in the steps of the Lord Jesus, and in the presence of insults to commit ourselves unto Him that judgeth righteously, remembering that word which says, "Avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine: I will repay saith the Lord" (Romans 12:19). Again we may recall the words of the prophet, "Jehovah is

good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him. It is good that one should both wait, and that in silence, for the salvation of Jehovah" (Lamentations 3:24-26).

Here then we have four steps, taken in perfection by the Lord, that we are exhorted to follow. In all these steps there is no word as to ministry, or any form of service, that would make any show in this world, or bring us into prominence amongst the people of God. This being so we might thoughtlessly say, as we read these exhortations, that to do no evil, speak no guile, to keep silence in the presence of insults, and commit oneself to God, does not seem after all very much, and is a little disappointing. If, however, we put these things into practice, and follow His steps it will assuredly be found that our brethren will not be disappointed in us. Could we but take these steps others would see in us the most wonderful sight that can be seen in this world — they would see A CHRIST-LIKE MAN.

God forbid that we should belittle true service for Christ, but let us not forget that we may travel world-wide in service, and preach to thousands, and our names be well known in religious circles, and our service duly recorded in religious papers, and yet all be of little account in God’s sight, if these four steps are lacking. Let us remember that we may speak with the tongues of angels and yet be nothing. So that, in the day to come it is possible that a thousand of our fine sermons, on which perhaps we prided ourselves, and for which our brethren may have praised us, will be found to be but dust and ashes, while some little bit of Christ in our lives, which we may have entirely forgotten, will shine out in all its beauty and receive its bright reward. Thus these steps may not take us into the public gaze to-day, but they will take us far into the Kingdom glories in the day to come. It is a word we do well to remember, "Many that are first shall be last; and the last first" (Mark 10:31).

2. "LEARN OF ME" (Matthew 11:29-30)

It will greatly help us to carry out the Apostle’s exhortation to "follow His steps" if we heed the Lord’s own words, "Learn of Me." To learn of the Lord, we must "Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners." In the early chapters of the Gospel of Matthew we see the Lord in the midst of Israel, on every hand dispensing grace and power in relieving men of every pressure under which they are found. He healed the sick, fed the hungry, clothed the naked, delivered from the power of Satan, forgave sins, and raised the dead. In result men fought against Him without a cause, rewarded Him evil for good and hatred for love (Psalms 109:5). They laughed him to scorn; they said, "He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils," and He was "a gluttonous man and a winebibber" (Matthew 9:20, Matthew 9:34; Matthew 11:19). In the presence of the contradiction of sinners, of the hatred that spurned His love, and the evil that scorned His goodness, how did He act? In the presence of all this enmity we read, that He gave Himself unto prayer (Psalms 109:4). Instead of turning upon His opposers and reviling those that reviled Him, He turned to God in prayer and committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously. In scorn, neglect, reviling, Thy patient grace stood firm:

Man’s malice unavailing To move Thy heart to haste.

Thus in this wonderful scene described in Matthew 11:1-30, which sums up the effect of His mighty works in the midst of Israel, we are permitted to see how the Lord acts when He is despised and rejected of men. We see Him turning to the Father in prayer, and we hear Him say,

"even so Father: for so it seemed good in Thy sight." He submits entirely to the Father's will and takes everything from His hand. Then, with Himself before us as the perfect Example, we hear Him say to us, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of Me. " In Scripture the "yoke" is ever a figure of submission to the will of another. From the beginning to the end of His wonderful path through this world, the Lord, as the perfect Man, was here for the will of the Father. Coming into the world, He could say, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God." Passing through the world he could say, "I came down from heaven not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me", and again, He says, "I do always those things that please Him." Going out of the world, He could say, in view of the cross, "Not My will but Thine be done" (Hebrews 10:9; John 5:38; John 8:29; Luke 22:42). Our little circumstances, however painful and trying at times, are as nothing compared with those the Lord had to face. But whatever they may be we are exhorted to take the Lord's yoke by quietly submitting to what the Father allows.

Moreover, the Lord says, "Learn of Me: for I am meek and lowly in heart." He was not only meek and lowly in manner, but He was "meek and lowly in heart." The right manner that men can see is comparatively easy to put on, but the right condition of heart, that the Lord alone can see, can only result from turning to the Lord in prayer and submitting to the Father's will. Naturally we are neither meek nor lowly. Instead of meekly giving way to others we assert ourselves; instead of having low thoughts of self we are naturally prone to self-importance. To correct all these natural tendencies of the flesh the Lord engages us with Himself, as He says, "Learn of Me." As we gaze upon Him, and admire these lovely qualities, we insensibly become changed into His image. We become morally like the One we admire. Alas! the fact that oftentimes we are so little like Him tells, only too plainly, how little we have Himself before our souls — how little we learn of Him.

Taking His yoke and learning of Him we shall find rest unto our souls. Dwelling upon the trying circumstances we may have to meet, fretting our souls over the insults that may be flung at us, the betrayal of false friends, the malice of jealous persons, will bring no rest to the soul. Submitting to what the Father allows and catching the beautiful spirit of Christ, in all its meekness and lowliness, as we learn of Him, we shall enjoy the rest of spirit that was ever the portion of the Lord in a world of unrest.

Moreover, if we take His yoke, and thus submit to the Father's will we shall find that His yoke is easy and His burden light. For in following His steps, doing no sin, speaking without guile, keeping silence in the presence of insults, and committing ourselves to God, we shall have His support as yoked with Him in submission to the Father's will. And with His support, and in fellowship with Him, we shall find how true are His words, "My yoke is easy, and My burden is light."

Thus, as we read these Scriptures, we are made conscious that Peter does not exhort us to take impossible steps; and the Lord does not ask us to learn impossible lessons.

Peter exhorts us, To do no sin, To use no guile, To be silent in the presence of insults, and To commit ourselves to GOD. The Lord asks us to learn of Him, in subjection to the Father's will, in meekness that thinks of others, and lowliness that does not think of self.

We wonder at Thy lowly mind And fain would like Thee be And all our rest and pleasure find In learning Lord, of Thee.

S. Jacob's Dream.

Jacob’s Dream.

Genesis 28:1-22.

Hamilton Smith.

Edification Vol. 6, 1932, page 263. This chapter of Genesis brings before us the first stage in Jacob’s flight from Beer-sheba, in the Land of Promise, to Padan-aram in the land of Mesopotamia.

Genesis 27:1-46 had presented a sorrowful picture of the household of the patriarch Isaac. Failure marks every member of the family. Isaac is seen as a feeble old man, governed by his appetites; Rebekah, plotting behind her husband’s back, instructs her son Jacob to wrong his brother and deceive his father. Jacob, listening to his mother’s evil advice, deliberately lies to his father, and supplants his brother; and Esau, discovering Jacob’s treachery, plots to murder his brother at the first opportune moment. As a result of all this corruption and deceit, Isaac has to dismiss Jacob from the home; Rebekah loses her favourite son never to see him again; Esau becomes a sorrow to his parents, and Jacob, for twenty years, becomes a wanderer in a strange land, banished from the home of his father and the Land of Promise. In the first stage of his journey, Jacob lights upon a certain place where he tarries for the night. There we see him a lonely man with a stone for his pillow, only the sky above him, and darkness closing around him. Yet, strangely enough as we might think, it is in this lonely place, when lying on the stony bed his sin had made, that the Lord meets him. The Lord had nothing to say to him by his father’s bedside, in the place of his sinning; but in the dreary spot where his sin had cast him, the Lord draws near, and turns his comfortless bed into a place of correction and consolation. In spite of Jacob’s many failures he was a man of faith, and blessed by God. His failures, indeed, obtain for him only trial and sorrow; his faith obtains for him a good report and a place amongst God’s Old Testament worthies (Hebrews 11:9, Hebrews 11:21). Nor is it otherwise with the believer today. On the one hand, God is not indifferent to our failures, and the fleshly way we may speak and act; for these things we have to suffer under His government. On the other hand, God is not indifferent to what is of Himself in each believer, according to that word in Hebrews 6:10-12, "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love." We alas! are sometimes over righteous in taking account of one another’s failures, and unrighteous in forgetting what is of God in one another.

There are thus two things Jacob has to learn on this memorable occasion. First, for his consolation, he will learn that all his failures will not alter God’s purpose to bless him in sovereign grace. Second, for his correction, he will learn that God’s sovereign grace will not stay God’s chastening hand on account of his failures. The sovereign grace of the Lord will not set aside the faithful government of the Lord. Jacob’s circumstances are not altered; he still has to pursue his lonely way as a wanderer, and spend long years in toil and bondage, in the house of the stranger, as the result of his sin against his father and brother. He has to reap what he has sown. If Jacob

deceives his father with the skills of goats so, in the years to come he will be deceived by his own sons with the blood of a goat. The sovereign grace by which we are blessed, does not alter that memorable law, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7).

However, the very sin for which Jacob had to suffer became the occasion of displaying the grace and mercy of God to the sufferer. To make known this grace the Lord appears to him in a dream. Jacob sees a ladder set up on earth whose top reaches the heavens. He sees the angels of God ascending and descending on the ladder. More wonderful still, he sees that, "The Lord stood above it." At the top of the ladder is the Lord of glory, at the bottom of the ladder is a failing, lonely man. Between the Lord at the top and Jacob at the bottom there are heavenly messengers from the Lord, and heavenly guardians for the saints, ascending and descending.

Then, most wonderful of all, to this feeble failing man below, the Lord of glory reveals Himself in sovereign grace as a Giver.

First, the Lord unconditionally secures the promised Land to Jacob and his heirs. He says, "The land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it and to thy seed."

Second, not only shall Jacob have the promise of the Land, but he shall have the presence of the Lord; not only the the gift but the Giver, for, says the Lord, "I am with thee."

Third, not only would he have the presence of the Lord, but he would have the support of the Lord, for the Lord can say, "I will keep thee in all places whither thou goest." If the Lord was with him He would be with him to preserve him.

Fourth, when his wandering days are done the Lord will bring Jacob back to the Land that He has given him, for the Lord says "I. . . will bring thee again into this land." Jacob’s sin may drive him from home; the Lord’s grace will bring him home. Says Naomi, after ten years of wandering, "The Lord hath brought me home again." Every sheep He picks up He brings home, and nothing but His home will do for His sheep.

We may wander, we may break down, we may fail most grievously, but at last He brings us home.

Finally, Jacob can depend upon the faithfulness of the Lord to His own word, for the Lord says, "I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." Whatever Jacob may be or do, and whatever we may be or do, He remains the same. Even if we are unfaithful, "He abideth faithful: He cannot deny Himself" (2 Timothy 2:13) ITS NEW TESTAMENT FULFILMENT. THE writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews 1:1-14 alludes to the fine scene recorded in Genesis 28:1-22. In Hebrews 13:5, we read, "He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Thus the promise made to Jacob is appropriated to the Christian. So we may rightly conclude that in the story of Genesis 28:1-22 there is a shadowing forth of good things to come. In Genesis God is speaking to one of the fathers in a dream; in the Epistle to the Hebrews we have, no longer the partial revelation of a dream, but, the full revelation in the Person of the Son. In Genesis Jacob is viewed as a pilgrim about to take a wilderness journey, with exceeding great and precious promises to support him in his journey and bring him home at last. In the Epistle to the Hebrews we have an application of Jacob’s dream, giving it a fuller, richer meaning for the Christian. In this Epistle the believer is viewed as a stranger in this world, and as a pilgrim going on to another world (Hebrews 11:13; Hebrews 13:14); and there is set before us a glorious Person, and great truths to

support us on our journey and bring us to glory at last.

Jacob’s dream opens with a vision of the Lord in glory at the top of the ladder: so the Epistle to the Hebrews opens with the great truth that the Lord of glory is "on high." The Son having finished His work on earth has "Sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." Throughout the Epistle this great truth is kept prominently before us. In Hebrews 1:3, He is presented as having sat down on the right hand of God, because of the glory of His Person: in Hebrews 8:1, He is there as our great High Priest: in Hebrews 10:12, He is there as a proof that His work is finished, and in HHebrews 12:2, He is there as having trodden the path of faith and reached the goal.

If, however, the Lord was at the top of Jacob’s ladder, at the bottom there was a poor weak failing man, encompassed with infirmities and surrounded by temptations. So in the Epistle to the Hebrews, when we come to the second chapter we find a company of people being brought on their way to glory. They are spoken of as "many sons" who are going to partake of glory but, at present, are partakers of flesh and blood; and, as such, are subject to temptations, compassed about with infirmities, and faced with needs, liable to persecutions, exposed to the contradiction of sinners, and opposed by adversaries (Hebrews 2:14-18; Hebrews 4:15-16; Hebrews 10:33; Hebrews 12:3; Hebrews 13:3).

Then, in Jacob’s dream, between the Lord at the top, and Jacob at the bottom, there were angels ascending and descending. So in the Epistle to the Hebrews, between the Lord on high brought before us in Hebrews 2:1-18, we read of the angels who are ministering spirits sent forth to minister to the heirs; of salvation (Hebrews 1:13-14) Here then at the outset of the Epistle we have a remarkable answer to Jacob’s dream.

Again we learn, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, the two great lessons that Jacob had to learn at Luz. First we are blessed by the sovereign grace of God that has taken us up, and made us heirs of the glory to which we are being brought through a wilderness scene. Second, the sovereign grace of God that has called us to glory, does not set aside the government of God that deals with us in chastening on the way to glory. (Hebrews 2:10; Hebrews 12:6).

Moreover, we can see in the Epistle how rich is the provision that God has made for our wilderness journey. We find, indeed, there is in the Epistle, an answer to every blessing that grace secured to Jacob. The first great truth that Jacob learned before he took a step of his journey, was, that the end of the journey is secured. The promised Land was assured to Jacob and his heirs. So in the Epistle to the Hebrews again and again, we find that heaven is secured to us. In Hebrews 2:10, we are passing on to glory; in Hebrews 3:1, we are partakers of the heavenly calling; in Hebrews 4:9, there is a rest that remaineth for us. In Hebrews 6:1-20, the Forerunner, even Jesus, has entered within the veil. In Hebrews 9:24, Christ has entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us. Thus, in different ways, the great truth is pressed upon us that, just as of old the Land was secured to Jacob, so heaven is secured to the Christian. Whatever difficulties we may have to meet, whatever trials there may be in the way, though dark valleys, rough ways and many a storm may intervene, yet, at every step, the glory shines before us. God would have us pursue our pilgrim path in the light of the glory to which it leads.

Further, Jacob had, not only the gift of the Land, but, the presence of the Giver. So as Christians we not only have heaven in view as our goal, but we have the Lord’s presence with us on the way

to heavier. Both at the beginning of the Epistle, and at the end, the writer quotes passages from the Old Testament to prove the Lord is present with His people. In Hebrews 2:1-18, quoting from Psalms 22:1-31, he says, "In the midst of the Church will I sing praise unto Thee;" and again he quotes Isaiah 8:1-22, "Behold I and the children which God hath given Me." Then, as the Epistle draws to its close, the Lord's words to Jacob are quoted to show that throughout our journey the Lord is with us, as He has said. "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." The quotations at the beginning of the Epistle show the Lord's association with His people collectively: the quotation at the end, His presence with each one individually. Alas I we may not always be consciously with Him; but He would have us to know that He is with us.

Also Jacob had the assurance of the Lord's support, for He said, "I . . . will keep thee in all places whither thou goest." In like manner the Epistle to the Hebrews very blessedly unfolds to us the priestly grace of the Lord that supports us in our journey through this world. The Lord, at the top of the ladder, is keeping His feeble, failing saints at the bottom of the ladder. In Hebrews 7:1-28, we learn that the One who is made higher than the heavens "ever liveth" for those who are on their way to heaven. It is true that the man at the bottom should ever live for the One at the top of the ladder, even as Paul could say, "For me to live is Christ;" but while we ofttimes fail to live for Him, He never ceases to live for us. Further the Epistle unfolds the effect of the Lord, at the top of the ladder, living for the man at the bottom. First, from Hebrews 2:1-18, we learn that He can help us in our temptations, and, that He does so as One who Himself has suffered being tempted. To resist the temptation involves suffering. The Lord, when tempted would rather suffer than yield to the temptation; and now, in the moments of our temptation, He is able to help us to suffer rather than sin by giving way to the temptation. Again we learn from Hebrews 4:15, that He feels for us in our infirmities. He is not unmoved by what His people suffer from the weakness of the body, for He has not only known temptation, but He has known weariness, and hunger and thirst. Lastly He intercedes for us according to His perfect knowledge of our needs. Thus we have the support of One who, not only lives, but "ever liveth"; and ever living He is able to save us to the uttermost — until earth's journey ends in heaven's glory, and time is closed by eternity.

Then the Lord told Jacob He would bring him into the Land that He had given him. So in the Epistle to the Hebrews we learn that not only has the Lord secured the glory for His people, but very soon He is going to bring His people into the glory, as we read, He is "bringing many sons to glory;" and it is but a "little while," and we shall reach that glory; for "yet a very little while, and He that shall come will come; and will not tarry" (Hebrews 10:37).

Finally, just as Jacob is assured that the Lord will be faithful to His word — that what He says He will do — so again and again we are assured of the immutability of God's Word. In Hebrews 1:1-14, we are told that God has spoken in the Son: in Hebrews 2:1-18 we are warned that if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, how much more the word of the Son. In Hebrews 6:16-18 we learn that God has not only spoken but confirmed His Word by His oath, and the Word and the oath are spoken of as two immutable things. Then, in Hebrews 12:1-29, we have the solemn warning that when God speaks, His word comes to pass, even to the shaking and removal of man's kingdom and the bringing in of the everlasting Kingdom that cannot be moved. And we are reminded that if God has spoken we can with the utmost confidence rely upon what God has said. (Hebrews 13:5-6)

Thus, in the Epistle to the Hebrews we have a Christian interpretation of Jacob’s dream. The Epistle opens by presenting Christ in the glory. It goes on to tell us who this glorious Person is, for of Him we read, "Thou remainest" and "Thou art the same." With the passing of time others pass away, and with the changing years others change; in Christ in the glory we have found One who will never pass away and will never change. Then, as the Epistle proceeds, we learn the gracious work that Christ is accomplishing; He is bringing many sons to glory, and as He brings them on their way, He succours them in their temptations, He feels for them in their infirmities, and He intercedes for them in their needs. He represents us in heaven, before the face of God, and in a "very little while" He is coming to receive us into glory. Thus we learn where Christ is, who Christ is, what He is doing, and what He will yet do in a very little while. How blessed then the position of the man at the bottom of the ladder, if walking in the light of the glorious Man at the top.

S. Joseph

Joseph

Hamilton Smith.

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LOVED To all who love our Lord Jesus Christ there is an abiding charm in the histories of the Old Testament saints, for therein can be traced bright unfoldings of the glories and excellencies of Christ. Such foreshadowings of things to come are doubtless hidden to the natural man, but plainly discerned by those who, through the Spirit, seek "in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." Of all Old Testament histories none presents a richer or more distinct picture of Christ than the touching story of Joseph. Other lives may give in greater detail personal experiences and human failure, teaching many a wholesome lesson; but as the story of Joseph is unfolded we feel that the Spirit of God keeps in view the display of the glory of Christ, and all that pertains to the weakness and failure of a man of like passions with ourselves has little or no place. And yet, however rich the picture, we soon recognize that the life of no single saint could adequately set forth the fullness of Christ. In common with Joseph, other saints of God, as Isaac in his day, and David and Solomon in a later day, have their tale to tell concerning the glories of Christ. Moreover, there is no mere repetition, each has some special glory to disclose. Isaac tells of the sufferings and affections of Christ whereby He gains His bride; David of His sufferings and victories whereby He gains His kingdom; Joseph of His suffering and supremacy by which He administers His kingdom. Solomon takes us a step further and unfolds the glories of His kingdom when He is supreme. HIS SERVICE The story opens with Joseph, as a lad of seventeen, feeding the flock with his brethren and "doing service" with the sons of Bilhah and with the sons of Zilpah. He who will yet be supreme must first be a servant. The place of supremacy is only reached by the path of service, according to the word of the Lord: "Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister, and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant" (Matthew 20:26-27). In this the Lord Himself is the perfect example of His own teaching, for He can say, "I am among you as He that serveth" (Matthew 22:27). And because He "took upon Him the form of a servant . . . and became obedient unto . . . the Cross.... God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a Name which is above every name." Thus at once in this history we see that shadowing forth of One that is greater than Joseph. HIS SHEPHERDING But there are other ways in which the opening history of Joseph will speak of Christ. Like Moses and David in a later date, Joseph is a leader of sheep before he becomes a leader of men. For forty years Moses must be content to

lead a flock of sheep at the back of the desert before he becomes the leader of God’s people through the desert. And of David, is it not written that Jehovah "chose . . . His servant and took him from the sheepfolds . . . He brought him to feed Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance" (Psalms 78:70-71)? Thus not only in the fact of service but in the manner of service these saints of old prefigure the great Shepherd of the sheep. HIS SEPARATION

Service with his brethren, however, does not necessarily imply fellowship with their evil. As the obedient servant he is very near them; as a man of integrity he is entirely apart from them. His service brought him into the company of others, his character made him a man apart from others, his very presence exposing their wickedness, so that he can but bring to his father "their evil report." And thus it was with Christ the perfect Saviour; His grace brought Him very near to us in all our need, His holiness kept Him entirely apart from all our sin. Our desperate needs, and His infinite grace, made Him a Servant moving amidst the needy crowds, and yet our sin and His holiness made Him a lonely Stranger in the land. As the perfect Servant He was accessible to all, as a holy Man He was apart from all. His service of love took Him into many a needy home, His holiness left Him without a home. HIS SUPERIORITY

If, however, the character of Joseph set him apart from his brethren, the love of his father gave him a distinguished place above his brethren, for we read "Israel loved Joseph more than all his children." Moreover Israel bears witness to this place of distinction by clothing Joseph with a coat of many colours — a public testimony to the delight of the father in his son. At once our thoughts travel from Joseph to Christ and the unique place He had in the Father’s affections, and the Father’s pleasure in bearing witness to His delight in His Son. The very chapter that tells us, "God so loved the world," also tells us that "the Father loveth the Son." A measure is given to the love of God for the world, infinite though it be, but no measure is, or can be, given for the Father’s love to the Son. The announcement stands in all its majestic dignity. "The Father loveth the Son," and faith delights to accept it. But if the Father can furnish no measure for this love, He can bear witness to His love for the Son. Joseph’s coat of many colours, the public testimony of his father’s love, has its bright counterpart in the opened heavens of the New Testament. Never are the heavens opened apart from Christ, and when opened they always bear some fresh witness to the Father’s delight in the all-varied graces of the Son. No sooner has Christ taken His place on earth as the Servant of Jehovah than at once "the heavens were opened unto Him" that the host of heaven might look down on a Man on earth of whom the Father can say: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:16-17). A little later and again the heavens are opened, that a man on earth may look up and bear witness to "the Son of Man" in heaven (Acts 7:55-56). Again, the day is not far distant when the heavens will be opened to let the Son of Man come forth in glory as the victorious "King of kings, and Lord of lords" (Revelation 19:11-16). Having come forth as King of kings the heavens will again be opened that ascending and descending angels may bear witness to the Son of Man reigning in glory on the earth (John 1:51). On these bright occasions we see our Lord Jesus invested with the coat of many colours. In other words, we see in the opened heavens the Father’s delight in Christ as His beloved Son in humiliation as the Son of Man in heavenly glory, and as the King of kings and Lord of lords, coming forth to reign on the earth as Son of Man in supreme power and glory. HIS SUPREMACY

Furthermore, the One who is loved by the Father, and marked out as the special object of His delight, is the One who is destined to universal supremacy. This great truth is brought before us in

Joseph’s dreams, both setting before us the supremacy of Joseph. One dream might have sufficed to foretell the glories of Joseph, but would be wholly inadequate to shadow forth the glories of Christ. For His supremacy will have a twofold character. He will yet be supreme on earth, and many passages tell of this earthly glory. The dream of the sheaves making obeisance to Joseph’s sheaf may well speak of this excellent supremacy over all the earth which Christ is destined to wield. Yet this first dream fails to set forth the supremacy of Christ in all its vast extent, for He is destined not only to be supreme on earth, but to hold universal sway over heaven and earth. The Father according to His good pleasure, has purposed in the fullness of times to head up, "all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth" (Ephesians 1:9-10). And this second dream speaks of this heavenly supremacy by presenting heavenly bodies — the sun, the moon, and the stars, making obeisance to Joseph. The two dreams thus set forth the supremacy of Christ over things on earth and things in heaven to the remotest bounds of the created universe. HIS SUFFERINGS

Thus the Spirit of God delights to exalt Christ by Presenting His universal supremacy as the leading thought in the history of Joseph even though it is the path of suffering by which the place of pre-eminence Is reached. There are the graces and excellencies of character that the sufferings call forth, as well as the heartlessness of His own and the evil and indifference of the world.

HATED

If Joseph has a unique place in his father’s affections, and if he is destined in the counsels of God to the place of supremacy, he will, in the meantime, have to face the hatred of his brethren. This must be so if, in any measure, his story is to shadow forth that far greater hatred which Christ was called to endure at the hands of men. The One whom God has destined to the place of universal dominion is the only one that is hated by every natural heart. Why does the natural heart bear such hatred to Christ? Was there any cause of hatred in Him? Surely not, for in Christ there was an entire absence of the cruelty and violence, the lust and covetousness, the pride and arrogance, the meanness and selfishness, which in other men give such occasion for hatred. In Him there was everything to call forth love. While others went about doing evil, He "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38). Man’s mouth may be full of cursing and bitterness, but at least man must bear witness to "the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth" (Luke 4:22), and the officers who were sent to take Him said, "Never man spake like this man" (John 7:46).

HATED BECAUSE THEY WERE EVIL And yet in spite of His acts of love, and His words of grace, they rewarded Him evil for good, and hatred for His love (Psalms 109:5). Truly He could say, "They hated me without a cause." Alas! plenty of cause of hatred, but no cause in Him. No cause in man to call forth Christ’s love, and no cause in Christ to call forth man’s hatred. But why should the evil heart of man hate the One whose whole life was spent in showing love to man? Let Joseph’s history supply the answer. Why was Joseph hated by his brethren? Was he not in their company as one that served? Truly, but they were evil and hence, however desirable his service might be, his presence exposed their evil, and called forth their hatred. And for a like cause, and in far deeper measure, the world hated Christ, as He could say, "Me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil" (John 7:7).

HATED BECAUSE THEY WERE ENVIOUS

There were other causes for the hatred of Joseph’s brethren. When they "saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him." And so with Christ confessing His unique place with the Father, He can say, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (John 5:17). Immediately the hatred of the Jews is called forth and "they sought the more to kill Him," and at once the Lord declares that "the Father loveth the on, and sheweth Him all things." The Beloved of he Father is hated by man.

HATED BECAUSE OF HIS DREAMS

Further, the dreams that speak of Joseph’s future supremacy are a fresh motive for the envy and hatred of the brethren. He had been a witness against them of their evil, now he is a witness to them of his future glory. They will have neither one nor the other. Even so when the Lord witnessed against the evil of the world, and bore witness to His coming glories, like Joseph, He drew upon Himself the hatred of the world. Before the assembled leaders of Jerusalem the Lord speaks of His coming glories: "Hereafter," He can say, "shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power," a confession that is followed by a furious outburst of hatred, priests and elders uniting to spit in the face of the Son of God.

HATED BECAUSE OF HIS WORDS

Lastly, the brethren of Joseph hated him for his words. As we read: "They hated him yet the more for his dreams and for his words." Nor was it otherwise with the Lord. Men heard the words of Him that spake as never man spake, and some believed, but "many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye Him?" The hatred could not be hid. So too Christ is still the object of a hatred that men cannot conceal, try as they will. A constant stream of abuse of His Name, denial of His Person, and refusal of His work, issues from apostate pulpits, and an infidel press, often masquerading under the cloak of religion. It is still His professed brethren that cannot speak peaceably of Him. But let us never forget that behind all the "hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him" there are the "ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed." The evil lives of Joseph’s brethren were behind the hatred in their hearts, and the evil words of their lips. It is so today, the ungodly deeds in men’s lives lead to the ’hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him" (Jude 1:15). But who Thy path of service, Thy steps removed from ill, Thy patient love to serve us, With human tongue can tell?

Midst sin, and all corruption, Where hatred did abound, Thy path of true perfection Was light on all around. In scorn, neglect, reviling, Thy patient grace stood fast;

Man’s malice unavailing To move Thy heart to haste.

O’er all Thy perfect goodness Rose blessedly divine;

Poor hearts oppressed with sadness, Found ever rest in Thine.

Love, that made Thee a Mourner In this sad world of woe, Made wretched man a scorner Of grace — that brought Thee low.

Still, in Thee, love’s sweet savour Shone forth in every deed; And showed God’s loving favour To every soul in need.

J. N. D.

2 Rejected and Sold Genesis 37:12-36

Jacob may have special affection for his son Joseph, nevertheless his other sons have a real place in his affections, and Joseph is to become the witness of the Father’s love to the brethren. Accordingly Jacob desires that Joseph shall leave the home in the vale of Hebron and journey to distant Shechem, there, as the sent one of the father, to enquire of his brethren’s welfare and bring Jacob word again. Joseph on his part is ready to obey, though he has experienced the hatred of his brethren. Jacob’s request meets with Joseph’s immediate response, "Here am I." So we read Israel "sent him out of the vale of Hebron" and Joseph "came to Shechem.’’ THE SON RESPONDING In this journey there is a foreshadowing of that far greater journey undertaken by the Son of God when, leaving the Father’s home of light and love, He came into this world of death and darkness, well knowing the evil into which He came. And yet He turned not back. Even as at the cross we read, "Jesus therefore knowing all things that should come upon Him went forth" (John 18:4). If the love of the Father would send Him, then the love of the Son is ready to do the Father’s bidding. "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God." He comes as the sent One of the Father to declare the Father’s love. THE SON REJECTED

Joseph’s touching story foreshadows too what manner of reception the world has given to the sent One of the Father. Having no heart for their father, these men of evil ways have no eyes to discern the sent one of his love. For them Joseph is only a dreamer whose dreams they would fain frustrate by conspiring to slay him. Even so of Christ, His people said, "This is the Heir, come let us kill Him." And how eager man is to express his hatred. "When they saw him afar off . . . they conspired against him to slay him." But God’s thoughts are not our thoughts, nor His ways as our ways. If it is a question of the Son of the Father’s love drawing near to men, then indeed He will be rejected while yet afar off. But if it is a question of a sinner being drawn to the Father, then we read while "yet a great way off his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him." THE SON REPROACHED The evil heart of man is marked by corruption and violence. Not only are the brethren ready to rid themselves of Joseph by violent acts, but they were prepared to cover their violence by corrupt and lying words. "Let us slay him," they say, "and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him." Violence and corruption are the outstanding marks of fallen man who is shameless in his violence and corruption. He is not simply overcome by some sudden temptation; but, as with Joseph’s brethren, they can deliberately plan their violent act and corrupt lies. Man had not progressed far on his downward course before "the earth was filled with violence" and "all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth." In spite of laws and treaties, moral training and codes of honour, and notwithstanding prisons and reformatories, violence and corruption are rampant in every part of the earth. THE SON REBUFFED

Nothing brings man’s evil into evidence like the presence of goodness. It was the presence of Joseph that called forth the violence and corruption of his brethren; even as the presence of perfect goodness in the Person of the Son of God became the occasion of the most furious outburst of man’s evil. At His birth the enmity of man is ready to kill the child Jesus, and to cover its murderous intent with lying words (Matthew 2:8, Matthew 2:16). But at the cross goodness is displayed as nowhere else only to call forth the greatest expression of man’s evil that the world has ever seen. There goodness rises to its supreme height, and evil sinks to unutterable depths.

The cross is the display of "hatred against God and good . . . the truest friend denies, the nearest betrays, the weaker ones who are honest flee the priests, set to have compassion on ignorant failure, plead furiously against innocence; the judge, washing his hands of condemned innocence; goodness alone and the world mean, universal enmity; against it. Perfect light has brought out the darkness; perfect love, jealous hatred." THE SON REVEALED

Man vainly imagines that corruption and violence will prosper, even as the brethren of Joseph, having counselled to slay their brother, and designed to cover their act with lying, can with the utmost confidence say, "We shall see what will become of his dreams." They will indeed see. And alas for the rejecters of Christ, they too will see, for is it not written, "Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him"? THE SON REVILED

Perfect goodness brings out the universal guilt of men, but though all are guilty, there are different measures of guilt, and of this the Judge of all the earth will take account in due time, rendering to one few stripes, and to another many stripes. Of these different degrees of guilt we have intimations in the story of Joseph. All the brethren were guilty, but not in the same degree. Reuben, though unstable, and morally corrupt as we know from his history (Genesis 5:22; Genesis 49:3-4), was not necessarily cruel. In common with his brethren he has wronged his father, but all human affection is not extinguished in his heart. He would have spared Joseph’s life, and his father’s feelings. Judah, too, may be covetous, but he also has some compunction as to laying hands upon his brother. And these differences we see in the way men treat the Christ of God. All verily are guilty, but there are degrees of guilt. Herod, vile and pleasure-loving man that he was, would mock the Lord and set Him at nought, but he finds nothing worthy of death in Him. Pilate will go further than Herod, and yield up Christ to the murderous hatred of the Jews; but he has no personal enmity, and will at least make some feeble effort to preserve from death One that he knows to be innocent. But of the Jews Peter has to say, "Ye delivered (Him) up and denied Him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go . . . and killed the Prince of life" (Acts 3:13-15). THE SON REFUSED And still there are the pleasure-lovers, strangers to all religious convictions, who have no good word for Christ and yet will not oppose. But there are others yet more guilty concerning Christ. They profess to admire His moral excellencies. Pilate-like they find no fault in Him; yet to retain their popularity with the world, they stifle their convictions, decide against Christ, and range themselves with that thrice-guilty class whose active enmity never ceases to attack His glorious Person and trample under foot His precious blood. There are the careless and indifferent, there are the fearful and fainthearted, and there are the furious haters — open and avowed enemies of Christ. But all unite in the rejection of Christ. THE SON REPUDIATED

Thus it was in Joseph’s history. His brethren stripped him of his coat of many colours and cast him into the pit. The father had distinguished him by a coat of many colours, the brethren degrade him by stripping him. So on many illustrious occasions when Christ is distinguished above all others by some special display of divine power, wisdom and grace, man will at once strip Him of His coat of many colours and seek to degrade Him to the level of a mere man by asking, ’Is not this the carpenter’s son?" or "Is not this the carpenter?" As in the case of Joseph, the stripping was only the prelude to the pit, so with Christ, the rejection of every witness to His glory, led man at last with wicked hands to deliver Him to death. THE SON RESCUED

There is however a significant difference between the type and the antitype. Isaac in his day very blessedly brings the death of Christ before us. He may be bound upon the altar, Abraham may stretch forth his hand and take the knife to slay his son, but at once the angel is present to stay his hand. Joseph may again take up the story of the cross, as his brethren cast him into the pit, but for him "the pit was empty, there was no water in it." How different the cross of Christ. The same God at whose bidding "Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son," can now say, "Awake, O sword, against the Man that is My fellow," and though twelve legions of angels await His commands, yet not one is bidden to hold back the sword of judgment. It is no empty pit into which He must go. He can say, "Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and Thou hast afflicted me with all Thy waves" (Psalms 88:6-7). THE SON REWARDED

While the sufferings of Isaac and Joseph both point to the cross, yet each portrays a different aspect of that great mystery. Isaac goes up to the mount to be offered up. Joseph goes down to the pit. And the mount speaks of the glory of the Person offered up. The pit tells of the misery and degradation of those for whom He is offered up. He is the son, and more, the only son, and yet more he is the promised heir, Isaac, and the beloved of his father. But when Joseph goes down to the pit, while it is true his moral excellence cannot be hid, yet it is not his personal glory that is prominent but rather the evil and corruption of those who surround Joseph. If at last his brethren are to be brought into blessing and share in the glory of Joseph, then Joseph must take their place of distance and degradation as set forth in the pit. "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission," and "except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die it abideth alone." THE SON REVEALING

Having cast Joseph into the pit, his brethren "sat down to eat bread." Nor was it otherwise at the cross. The presence of Joseph only serves to reveal the evil of his brethren, just as the cross becomes the occasion to expose the depth of corruption in the heart of man. The leaders of Israel yield up the true Passover Lamb to death, and calmly sit down to eat the passover feast — an evil and adulterous generation, like the adulterous woman of Proverbs, of whom it is written "She eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith I have done no wickedness." The company of merchant men on their way to Egypt at once suggest to Judah the opportunity of making profit out of their brother. Why not sell Joseph and make a little money? If they are not going to gratify their hatred by killing Joseph, why not gratify their covetousness by selling Joseph? Hence they gave their brother up to the Gentiles, and gave themselves up to money making. And what Judah did a thousand years before Christ came, His descendants have done for nearly two thousand years since His rejection. At the cross the Jews abandoned their Messiah to the Gentiles and ever since they have abandoned themselves to the worship of mammon. "Profit" is the word that governed the actions of Joseph’s brethren. Judah asks the question for the covetous heart — not "Is it right?" or "Is it wrong?" but "What profit is it?" And "profit" has governed the policy of the Jew throughout the long centuries since that sad day when their Messiah was sold for thirty pieces of silver. THE SON REMOVED

Thus Joseph passes into the land of the Gentiles and is "brought" into Egypt. Egypt was a snare to Abraham, and his sojourn in Egypt brought him only sorrow and shame. With Joseph, however, it brought blessing and glory. Why this difference? Is it not that in Abraham’s case he "went down into Egypt to sojourn there" (Genesis 12:10); but Joseph was "brought" into Egypt. One went there

in unbelief and self-will. The other was brought there according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.

Having practiced a heartless piece of deceit upon their father, which plunges the old man into the deepest sorrow, these hypocrites gather round to comfort him. While none can excuse the wickedness of his sons, yet we cannot but see in this scene that Jacob is only reaping what he had already sown. Thirty years before Jacob had deceived his father with "the skins of the kids of the goats," and now after long years, he himself is deceived by his sons with "a kid of the goats." There may be long years between the sowing and the reaping, but at last the reaping time comes. The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceeding small. THE SON RESURRECTED

We need hardly wonder that Jacob "refused to be comforted" by such comforters, but in the presence of what to him was the actual death of his son, his faith seems to have grown exceeding dim. How different the behaviour of David in the presence of the death of his son. Jacob says, "I will go down into the grave unto my son in mourning"; but of David we read he "arose . . . and came into the house of the Lord and worshipped." Both men are in the presence of the death of a child, but one says, "I will go down into the grave mourning," the other, "I will go up to the house of the Lord and worship." Yet both were true saints, but one looked no further than death and the grave, the other looked beyond death to resurrection, into a scene where there is "no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying nor pain."

O bright and blessed scenes, where sin can never come, Whose sight our longing spirit weans, from earth where yet we roam! And can we call our home our Father’s house on high, The rest of God our rest to come, our place of liberty?

Yes! in that light unstained, our stainless souls shall live, Our heart’s deep longings more than gained, where God His rest shall give. His presence there, my soul, its rest, its joy untold, Shall find when endless ages roll, and time shall ne’er grow old.

J.N.D.

3 Suffering and Supported Genesis 39:1-23 & Genesis 40:1-23 The history of Joseph already considered presents in type the rejection of Christ by the Jew. The history that follows gives the experience of Joseph in the hands of the Egyptians, speaking to us of the rejection of Christ by the Gentiles. At the hands of his brethren Joseph is consigned to the pit. In the hands of the Gentiles he is bound in the prison. We need both pictures to adequately set forth the truth, for the coming of the Son of God into the world cannot be confined to the Jew. Truly He was sent by the Father to His own, but equally true He came that the world through Him might be saved. Alas! He was rejected by both Jew and Gentile, "He was in the world . . . and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own and His own received Him not" (John 1:10-11).

TWOFOLD SUFFERING

While, however, both Jew and Gentile joined in rejecting Christ, there was a difference in the way they treated Him; a difference that was foreshadowed in he history of Joseph. With the brethren the leading motive for their rejection of Joseph was envy and hatred. However, in the house of the Gentile, though we see corruption and injustice at work, and in the prison of the Gentile selfish indifference, yet in neither case was there actual enmity to Joseph. And these differences between

Jew and Gentile are strikingly seen at the Cross. Cross injustice and callous indifference may mark Herod and Pontius Pilate, the representatives of the Gentiles, but envy and deadly hatred mark the Jews — such envy that it is even discerned by the Gentile, and such hatred that it blinded them to every appeal of reason, every demand of justice, and to all sense of shame.

PROLONGED SUFFERING

Returning to the story of Joseph in Egypt we have other lessons to learn. Cut off from his own people in a strange land he becomes a slave in the house of the Egyptian; falsely accused by a wicked woman, and under the stigma of a great sin, he is cast into prison. There treated with base ingratitude, he is left to languish, a forgotten man. Suffering dishonour upon dishonour, his path is ever downward. The clouds gather round him and his way grows darker, until apparently his sun has set in hopeless gloom.

CRUEL SUFFERING But behind all that is apparent to nature, faith can discern the purpose of God to exalt Joseph to a position of supremacy and glory. If God is set upon the fulfilment of His purpose, Satan will put forth every effort to thwart God’s purpose. Satan uses the wickedness of the brethren to banish Joseph from house and home; he uses Potiphar’s wicked wife to bring Joseph into prison; and he uses Pharaoh’s ungrateful butler to keep him there. Every step in the downward path is an apparent triumph for Satan, and would seem to make the fulfilment of God’s purpose more remote. To the natural view Satan’s plans appear to prosper, and God’s purposes suffered apparent defeat.

NECESSARY SUFFERING

Faith, however, can discern the hand of God behind the wiles of Satan. If Satan is using man to hinder God’s purposes, God is using Satan to carry them out. Every kind of agent is at God’s disposal. Angels and archangels, saints and sinners, the devil and his demons, all serve to carry out God’s plans. The very elements — fire and hail, snow and vapours, and stormy wind — are "fulfilling His word" (Psalms 148:8). Nor is it otherwise with the circumstances of life, as we see in the story of Joseph. The trials he passes through, the treatment at the hands of his brethren, the bondage in the house of the Egyptian, the false accusations of Potiphar’s wife, the prison of Pharaoh, and the neglect of Pharaoh’s butler, are only so many stages in the path that leads to glory. His labours as a shepherd, his mission to his brethren, his services in Potiphar’s house and in Pharaoh’s prison are preparing for the exercise of power in the day of his glory. The service in the trials prepares for the right use of glory.

TYPICAL SUFFERING In all this Joseph is but a type of One whose sufferings were far deeper even as His glory is far greater. He, too, in the days of His flesh was amongst us as One that serves, for He could say, "Man acquired Me as bondman from My youth" (Zechariah 13:5, N . Tr.) . He, too, suffered under the false accusations of the wicked, for again He can say, "They laid to My charge things that I knew not" (Psalms 35:11). He, too, was led to prison and to death; and in a full measure He had to meet the base ingratitude of those who had received only good at His hands, so that, with a heart broken by unrequited love, He cries, "I am forgotten as a dead man out of mind" (Psalms 31:12).

PREPARATORY SUFFERING But as with Joseph in type, so with Christ the glorious antitype, every downward step in the path of suffering was but a further stage on the way to glory. His

service in the days of His flesh prepares for His rule as King of kings and Lord of lords. The false witnesses that rose up against Him will bow down before Him when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord to the glory of God the Father. The day is not far distant when the "poor wise Man" that no man remembered shall be "in everlasting remembrance" (Ecclesiastes 9:15; Psalms 112:6).

SUBMISSIVE SUFFERING But not only does this portion of the history of Joseph supply a beautiful type of Christ, but it is rich with practical instruction for the saint in his individual path. First, we cannot read the story without being impressed with the fact that he was a submissive man. His circumstances were hard and his position trying. Cut off from his kindred, a stranger in a foreign land, he had passed from the love of his father's home to the bondage of the Egyptian's house, yet there is no repining. He harbours no bitter thoughts against his brethren, utters no complaints as to his hard lot, nor a single rebellious word against the ways of God. His spirit was kept in beautiful submission. Had not God revealed to him his high destiny - and faith, resting in quiet confidence in God's word looks on with clear vision to the glorious end (see 2 Corinthians 4:17-18). Faith kept God and His word between himself and his circumstances. In the path of God's purpose he submits to God's ways. So Paul, another prisoner of the Lord in another day, in like spirit of submission, writes from his prison, "the circumstances in which I am have fallen out rather to the furtherance of the gospel."

PROFITABLE SUFFERING As a result, "the Lord was with Joseph and he was a prosperous man" (verse 2). The submissive man will ever be a prosperous man. Nature would say that slavery and prosperity must be an impossible combination, but if we submit to His ways, the presence of the Lord can turn days of adversity into days of prosperity. All the world would admit that Joseph was a prosperous man in the day of his exaltation, jut faith sees, and God declares, that he was a prosperous man in the day of his humiliation. He will, in due time ride prosperously as the ruler of Egypt, but first he must live prosperously as the slave of an Egyptian. The prosperity of the prison must precede The prosperity of the palace. The trials and the sorrows, the losses and the crosses, the rough ways and the dark valleys, will all become occasions of the greatest soul prosperity if we remember that God has a settled purpose for us in glory, and in the meantime all His ways with us are in view of His purpose for us. In the light of His purpose we shall be able to submit to His ways, and submitting we shall find the Lord with us, and if the Lord is with us we shall prosper with that prosperity that is above all — the prosperity of the soul. "Beloved," says the aged apostle, "I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper, and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth" (3 John 1:2).

PATIENT SUFFERING

Moreover, being a prosperous man Joseph became l witness for the Lord in the house of bondage. We read, "His master saw that the Lord was with him" (3 John 1:3). His testimony, too, was the testimony of his life rather than his lips. Potiphar was impressed by what he "saw" rather than by what he heard. "His master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand." Had Joseph been for ever complaining of his hard lot, or enlarging upon his high destiny, he would have been no witness for the Lord in the house of Potiphar. The Egyptian cared nothing about his past, and, even if set before him, would comprehend nothing of his future, but his daily life of wholehearted attention to his duties Potiphar could see and

appreciate. Nor is it otherwise today. For a Christian servant to be often grumbling at his lot before his unconverted master, and saying that the day is coming when he will judge the world and even angels, would be wholly out of place. To an unconverted master it would not only be the wildest folly but also the grossest impertinence. To speak to the world of the glorious purposes of God is only to cast pearls before swine. These are things totally beyond the comprehension of the natural man. But to see a Christian servant living a quiet, consistent, uncomplaining life, in the faithful discharge of daily duties, is indeed a true witness for the Lord, and is something that the unconverted master can appreciate.

REWARDED SUFFERING

Thus it was In the history of Joseph, with the result that the one who was a witness for the Lord was respected and trusted by man. So we read, "Joseph found grace in his sight . . . and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand" (v. 4). The Lord was not only with Joseph, but He was for Joseph, disposing the heart of the master in favour of his servant.

It follows that Joseph became a source of blessing in the house of the Gentile: "It came to pass from the time that he made him overseer in his house, and over all that he had, that the Lord blessed the Egyptian’s house for Joseph’s sake, and the blessing of the Lord was upon all that he had in the house, and in the field" (v. 5). The Christian is not only called to blessing but, as he passes along his way, to be a blessing.

MEEK SUFFERING

Viewing Joseph as a type of Christ, it is important to remember that it was God’s purpose to set Joseph in the place of supremacy, and hence every one who submits to his supremacy is blessed. Thus Potiphar gives Joseph a place of supremacy in his household, and immediately Potiphar is blessed. A little later the jailer makes Joseph supreme in the prison and blessing follows. Just as in the day of his universal supremacy all submit to him, and all are blessed. The world will be compelled to submit to the supremacy of Christ in the day of His manifested power, but faith delights to anticipate that day and own His supremacy in the day of His rejection. And in the measure in which we yield ourselves, our lives, our all, to the supremacy of Christ, we too shall be blessed, even as the world will be blessed when it submits to His universal sway. The supremacy of Christ demands the submission of man, and the submission of man leads to the blessing of man, though in the day of His rejection that blessing is spiritual rather than material.

Thus we have seen that in the house of the Gentile Joseph was a submissive man, a prosperous man, a witness for the Lord, a respected and trusted man, and a centre of blessing. Such characteristics constitute a very complete life, and hence we are not surprised to read that "Joseph was of a beautiful form and of a beautiful countenance" (v. 6, N. Tr.). The life that is beautiful before God and man is exemplified in this Old Testament saint.

TRIUMPHANT SUFFERING

It is not, however, to be expected that the devil will leave unmolested a life that is beautiful in the sight of God and man. Devotion to the Lord exposes Joseph to the hatred of the devil. Having entirely failed to overcome Joseph by the frowns of the world and the trials of hard circumstances, the devil alters his tactics and seeks to overcome Joseph by the pleasures of sin. In the person of

Potiphar’s wife he has a ready instrument whereby to tempt Joseph, combined with circumstances that favour her evil designs. In result the temptation only serves to bring out the moral excellence of Joseph. He escapes the snare through maintaining his faithfulness to his master and his tear of God. "Behold," says Joseph, "my master . . . hath committed all that he hath to my hand . . . how then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" (vv. 8, 9). Here is the secret of Joseph’s consistent life before his master. He served faithfully in the presence of man, because he walked continually in the presence of God; and walking in the fear of God he was kept in the hour of temptation. Well for each one of us, if the moment of fierce temptation finds us walking so near to God, that at once we ask, "Can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" To ask that question is to escape the snare. The only thing we have really to be afraid of is fearing anything, or anyone, more than God.

PROLONGED SUFFERING The devil, however, is not content with isolated attacks upon the children of God. He will wage a continual warfare. It was so with Joseph. The temptation came "day by day" (v. 10), and the attacks more persistent until Joseph "flees" from the temptation and the devil is foiled. But having failed as the tempter, he now becomes the persecutor (vv. 13-18). The woman who formerly had cast her evil eyes upon Joseph now witnesses with lying tongue against him, as an old divine has said, "Those who have broken the bonds of modesty will never be held by the bonds of truth. It is no new thing for the best of men to be falsely accused of the worst crimes by those who are themselves the worst of criminals." In result Joseph escapes from a bad woman and retains a good conscience. But to retain a good conscience may cost much. Joseph has to exchange the comfort of Potiphar’s house for the hardships of Pharaoh’s prison.

Here Joseph must pass through a new testing. In the house of Potiphar he has borne a bright witness for God, he has overcome temptation, and endured persecution. In the prison of Pharaoh he must learn not only to witness for God, but to wait for God. This as we well know, is one of the hardest lessons for the saint to learn. It is one thing to witness for God in the busy world, it is a very different thing to wait for God in the lonely prison; in fact it is impossible to nature. Saul the natural man, lost his kingdom because he could not wait for God (1 Samuel 10:8; 1 Samuel 13:8-14). But while it is impossible to nature it is a sore trial for the man of faith. Abraham in his day must earn to wait for God. Under the stress of waiting he yields to the suggestion of nature and unbelief and attempts to obtain the promised seed by fleshly means, only to find that he is shut up to God, and must wait thirteen long years to reach God’s due time. So, too, at a later date no one could have given a bolder witless than John the Baptist in the day of Bethabara; in the presence of the assembled crowd, he exclaims, ’This is He of whom I said, After me cometh a Man which is preferred before me; for He was before me." But when John finds himself within the prison walls, when the crowds have gone, when the witnessing time is over, and the waiting time has come, then under the stress of this new trial he exclaims, "Art Thou He that should come?" (John 1:30; Matthew 11:3).

UNRELIEVED SUFFERING

Thus Joseph, in his day, finds the waiting time in prison a testing time for faith. He, too, seeks deliverance by an arm of flesh. Having befriended the king’s butler, he naturally concludes the butler will intervene with Pharaoh to obtain his release. "Think on me," says Joseph, "when it shall be well with thee, and show kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto

Pharaoh, and bring me out of his house." Joseph must not only learn that the help of man is vain, but that God is his only resource. ’God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." But to receive this "help" we must learn to "be still" and know that God is God (Psalms 46:1, Psalms 46:10). God has His time as well as His way to bring His purposes to pass.

RELIEF IN SUFFERING In the meantime, if man forgets to show Joseph Kindness, God will not forget to show him mercy. As we read, "The Lord was with Joseph and showed him mercy." Joseph may fail, just as we may and do, but the Lord’s "compassions fail not, they are new every mornings great is thy faithfulness. The Lord is my portion saith my soul; therefore I hope in Him" (Lamentations 3:22-24). The devil may tempt us day by day, and God may test by keeping us waiting from day to lay, nevertheless His mercy will be renewed every lay. Thus though we oft-times have to wait for the Lord’s deliverance, yet "The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him," and on our side we learn that "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait For the salvation of the Lord" (Lamentations 3:25-26). Forgotten by man Joseph is remembered by the Lord, until in God’s due time he learns that "those that wait upon the Lord . . . shall inherit the earth" (Psalms 37:9) .

Commit thy way to God, The weight that makes thee faint;

Worlds are to Him no load, To Him breathe thy complaint.

He, who for winds and clouds Maketh a pathway free, Through wastes and hostile crowds, Can make a way for thee.

Hope, then, though woes doubled;

Hope and be undismayed;

Let not thy heart he troubled, Nor let it be afraid. This prison where thou art —

Thy God will break it soon, And flood with light thy heart In His own blessed noon.

Paul Gerhardt 4 Exaltation and Glory Genesis 41:1-57 In this portion of Joseph’s history we reach the period in which God unfolds His plan for the glory and exaltation of Joseph as well as the government of Egypt. And as this fine story is developed we see therein a picture of God’s purpose for the exaltation of Christ and God’s plan for the government of the world.

GOD’S INSTRUMENTS

God’s plans, however, must be carried out in God’s time, by God’s instruments, and in God’s way. Joseph had probably looked forward to an immediate release when the butler was restored to his position in Pharaoh’s household. But two full years must pass before God’s time is reached. The due time having come, the last instrument in the hand of God is ready to complete the work that leads to the exaltation of Joseph. Already God had used the king’s captain, the king’s jailer, and the king’s butler, now He will use the king himself. Moreover, it must be in God’s way. It will be "a dream, a vision of the night," by which He will trouble the spirit of Pharaoh and awaken the slumbering memory of Pharaoh’s butler (vv. 8, 9).

MAN’S INTELLECT

First God reveals what He is about to do; but even so man cannot profit by the revelation. God will speak in a vision to Pharaoh by writing on the wall in Belshazzar’s day, by "great plainness of speech" In our day, but, as in the days that are past, so now, the wise men of this world are utterly at fault in their efforts to interpret the Word of God. Thus Pharaoh appeals to the "magicians of Egypt and all the wise men thereof," only to find "there was none to interpret" his dreams (v. 8). Man’s natural pride of intellect blinds him to the simple fact that communications from God can only be interpreted by God.

FAITHFUL INTERPRETATION

Having thus destroyed "the wisdom of the wise" and brought "to nothing the understanding of the prudent," God falls back on the man of His reserve, "a man in whom the spirit of God is." But God’s man is always of little account in the eyes of the world. The man who is destined to wield a power that no mortal, before or since, has ever exercised, is for the moment languishing in a prison and reckoned among "the base things of the world and things which are despised." Nevertheless, he is the chosen of God to "confound the mighty" and "bring to naught the things that are." So it comes to pass that Joseph is brought from the dungeon into the presence of earth’s most powerful monarch. Pharaoh, speaking as a natural man, at once says, "I have heard say of thee, that thou canst understand a dream to interpret it." Joseph straightway confesses, "It is not in me." It was no more in Joseph than in the wise men of Egypt. They may indeed be learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, they may hold the very highest positions in the court of the king; Joseph, on the other hand, is "a young man, an Hebrew, a bondman," in a dungeon, but God being with him he can surpass the wisdom of the wise, stand without fear in the presence of the king, and with the utmost confidence say, "God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace." He does not say, "God can give Pharaoh an answer," however true that would have been, but faith passing beyond what God can do, definitely states what God will do.

CLEAR INSIGHT

It is still the possession of the Spirit of God that makes the immeasurable difference between the children of God and the wise men of the world. Many indeed may possess giant intellects, well stored with such learning as this world can afford, holding, too, high rank in the religious world, but unless born again they are mere natural men, without the Spirit, and cannot even see the things that belong to the kingdom of God, much less enter that fair kingdom.

DIVINE INTELLIGENCE

Having heard Pharaoh’s account of his dream, Joseph proceeds to give the king a threefold message from God. First he twice repeats that "God hath showed Pharaoh what He is about to do" (vv. 25, 28). The wise men of Egypt doubtless had their theories as to the future of Egypt, and shaped their policies and made their plans in accordance with their own ideas — even as today the leaders of this world, whether political, religious, intellectual, capitalist, or labour, have their various theories of future government of the world. But from the most exalted imperialist through all shades of thought to the most degraded Bolshevist, there is one thing in common — all the theories of men leave God out of God’s world. Men will not own God as "the God of heaven and earth." God is welcome to heaven, about which man knows nothing and cares less, but as for earth, the centre of all man’s affections, it must be governed according to man’s ideal, an ideal

which enthrones the will of man as supreme to the total exclusion of God. Nevertheless, God has His plans for the future government of the world, and of these plans He has not left us in ignorance. In Pharaoh's day, "He showed Pharaoh by a dream what He was about to do. In our day He has shown us still more plainly by direct revelation "what He is about to do." God was going to govern Egypt by one who had been rejected by his brethren, cast out, and forgotten by the world. And God has disclosed to us that according to His good pleasure He has purposed to head up all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth. The One, who, when He entered the world, found "no room" even in a wayside inn, who, as He passed through it, was "a stranger in the land" and a "wayfaring man" with not where to lay His head, who when He went out of the world was nailed to a cross between two thieves, is the One of whom God has decreed, "The government shall be upon His shoulder; and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6, N. Tr.).

HUMAN INSTABILITY

Moreover, Pharaoh learns a second truth at the lips of Joseph. Not only has God a plan for the government of Egypt, but "the thing is established by God" (v. 32). The ingenuity of man can evolve a bewildering succession of theories and plans, but over all there is the fatal stamp) of utter instability. One generation unfolds its theories and pursues its plans with immense energy, only to have them entirely flung aside by a succeeding generation. But God only can declare "the end from tie beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not," and He can say, "My counsel shall stand and I will do all my pleasure" (Isaiah 46:10).

DIRECT INTERVENTION

Then a third truth is proclaimed to Pharaoh. Not only "the thing is established boy God," but "God will shortly bring it to pass" (v. 32). God has a revealed plan. God has established His plan, and what God has planned and established, God will bring to pass. Men dream of bringing about a millennium after their own thoughts and by their own efforts, through education, civilization, disarmament, leagues and confederacies, but all will be in vain. God has made it perfectly clear that His millennium will only be Drought about by the direct intervention of God Himself. As in Joseph's day, so in our day, "God will bring it to pass." Has He not said by the mouth of the prophet, "I have spoken it and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it" (Isaiah 46:11)? Moreover, "God will shortly bring it to pass." The time may seem long, for God has lingered in longsuffering grace, not willing that any should perish, but as in Pharaoh's day so in ours, it has been given to the One who is going to be supreme, "to show unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass" (Revelation 1:1).

EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION In accordance with God's settled plan, Pharaoh is also instructed as to the way God will take to carry out His plans. Seven years of plenty will be followed by seven years of famine, and Pharaoh is told to "look out a man discreet and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt" (vv. 21-33). Two things mark this plan. First, God ordains that only one man shall be over the land, second, God will so order circumstances that all will be brought under the sway of this man. Joseph was to be set over all, and all would be brought under Joseph by the seven years of plenty followed by the seven years of famine. The circumstances and the man would combine to bring about God's purposed plan.

PROPHETIC INSIGHT

This, too, is God’s plan for the future government of the world. Not by parliaments, or cabinets, not by counsellors and ministers, will God govern, but by "a Man discreet and wise" set over all. And all will be brought under His sway either by the day of grace or in the day of judgment — the years of plenty or the years of famine. For nearly two thousand years God has been meeting man’s deepest need according to the riches of His grace, and many have thus been brought under the sway of Christ by confessing Him as Lord to His glory and their blessing. But the world at large that has neglected God’s grace and rejected the claims of Christ will be brought to bow in the day of judgment that will follow the years of grace. "When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness" (Psalms 26:9).

OUTSTANDING IMPORTANCE

All being good in the eyes of Pharaoh, he proceeds to carry out the God-given counsels of Joseph. Thus it came to pass that the man "who was separated from his brethren" is exalted to a place of supremacy "over all the land of Egypt." The rejection by his brethren, the humiliation he had borne, the lowly positions he had filled, and the sufferings he had endured, all led to the place of exaltation, and have an answer in the varied glories that fall to him as lord of all. Moreover if the days of his sorrows were a foreshadowing of the yet deeper sufferings and rejection of Christ, so too the supremacy of Joseph foreshadows the still greater glories of Christ as the exalted Man. In story after story of great saints of old the Spirit of God delights to anticipate the supremacy of Christ; by glowing Psalms and thrilling prophecies His exaltation is foretold, and when at last — His sufferings all fulfilled — He is glorified at God’s right hand, with yet greater delight the Holy Spirit takes of the things of Christ and unfolds before us His varied glories as the One exalted over all.

WORTHY PRE-EMINENCE In Ephesians we learn that the counsel of God has purposed the exaltation of Christ, for there we read that, "according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself," He is going to head up all things in Christ, "both which are in heaven and which are on earth," and in accord with this purpose He has already "set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world but also in that which is to come; and hath put all things under His feet." In Colossians we learn that the glory of His Person demands the place of exaltation. If He is "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation," the One by whom all things were created, who is before all, and sustainer of all, then indeed He must "in all things" have the preeminence. In Philippians His lowly grace secures His exaltation, for there we read that "He made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a Name which is above every name." In Hebrews His sufferings prepare Him for His exaltation. The One who is set over all — crowned with glory and honour — was first made perfect through sufferings. In Peter we learn that His preciousness in the eyes of God is witnessed by His exaltation. The "stone, cast away indeed as worthless by men," but with God ’chosen" and "precious," has been made the head of the corner.

Moreover, John tells us that if others are to share in the blessings and glory of His exaltation, then suffering and death must be the pathway to exaltation. When the moment had arrived that the Son of Man should be glorified, then the time had come when that corn of wheat must fall into the ground and die, or ever abide alone.

CONSISTENT INVESTMENT But if Joseph is set in a place of supremacy he must needs be there in a condition suited to the place. The prison garments are put off with the passing of prison circumstances. The royal ring, the fine linen, and the chain of gold betoken his high estate, and in a yet deeper and more spiritual way is this true of Christ in His exaltation. The garments of humiliation and poverty by which in grace He clothed Himself, or man in scorn placed upon Him, are forever laid aside. The crown of thorns is exchanged for a crown of glory, the reed for the royal sceptre, and the seamless robe for the shining raiment exceeding white as snow. On earth He appeared as the poor Man, in heaven the glory of God is shining in His face. Not only is He in glory but He is glorified.

REASONABLE INFERENCE As exalted and vested with glory, all are called to "bow the knee" to Joseph and no man is to act independently of him "Without thee," says Pharaoh, 'shall no man lift up his hand in all the land of Egypt." If Joseph is supreme, all are called to submit. And so today, if God has exalted the Lord Jesus and given Him a Name which is above every name, it is "that at the Name of Jesus every knee shall bow." The Christian delights to bow during the plenteous years of grace; the world will be compelled to bow in the years of famine.

SHARED INHERITANCE In the day of his exaltation Joseph is proved to be a true Revealer of Secrets or Zaphnath-paaneah. The wise men of Egypt, with all their learning, could not interpret mysteries or unroll the future. God, too, has His mysteries unknown and unuttered by prophets, priests, or kings. Glorious things they had to say of Christ, but there were secrets that awaited the coming of Christ — the Revealer of Secrets. Then indeed, when Christ is exalted, the greatest mystery of all is disclosed — the mystery of Christ and the church, of which, now that it is revealed, we can see a dim shadow in Joseph and Asenath, his Gentile bride. Rejected by his brethren who are left in far off Canaan, he is, unknown to them, exalted to a place of highest supremacy, there to receive a Gentile bride to share his place of glory. So Christ, rejected on earth by Israel, leaves them under guilt of their sin, and takes a place in heaven, and during His session at the right hand of God the church is called out from the nations and presented to Him to share His kingdom glories.

GREAT INGATHERING

During the years of plenty Joseph uses his place of exaltation to reap a great harvest for Egypt. He deals with the harvest of Egypt during the years of plenty, he will deal with the men of Egypt during the years Of famine (vv. 36-49). In this day of grace the world is passing through its "seven plenteous years," when the grace of God is bestowing blessings by "handfuls." The men of the world may entirely neglect the blessings that grace brings to their door, and pursue their way quite heedless of the future. Apparently the men of Egypt took no advantage of the years of plenty to lay up for the years of famine. We do not read that they gathered up any food. It was Joseph that went throughout the land, and gathered up corn. And so today it is the exalted Christ who is reaping a harvest of souls during the day of grace. He is going through the world gathering His people out of the world. But when the days of grace have run their course He will deal with the men of the world.

PERFECT SATISFACTION The two sons that are born to Joseph will also bear their witness to Christ. Manasseh, as we know, signifies "forgetting," and Ephraim "fruitful." Rejected by his brethren, his path had been one of suffering and toil, but Joseph has his great reward and becomes fruitful in the land of his affliction. Nor is it other wise with Christ. His ancient people may despise and reject Him, they may number Him with the transgressors, but in the day of His rejection, when His soul is made an offering for sin, then "He shall see His seed," yea, "He shall see of the fruit of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied." Israel could say, "His blood be on us and on our children," and they will drink to the dregs their cup of guilt, but Christ has not lost by their rejection. His "toil" has its glorious answer in a great harvest of souls gathered out of the world during the time of His rejection by Israel. The time when He is "forgotten" by Israel is the time when He gathers fruit among the Gentiles.

Lord, we joy, Thy toils are ended, Glad Thy suff'ring time is o'er. To Thy Father's throne ascended, There Thou liv'st to die no more.

Lord, we worship and adore Thee For Thy rich, Thy matchless grace;

Perfect soon in joy before Thee, we shall see Thee face to face.

5 The Years of Famine Genesis 41:53-57; Genesis 42:1-38

We have traced Joseph's path to a position of exaltation and power, and we have seen how he used that tower during the years of plenty. But "the seven years of plenteousness, that was in the land of Egypt, were ended. And the seven years of dearth began to come" (vv. 53, 54). How will Joseph act in the years of dearth? His brethren had consigned him to the pit, the Gentiles had flung him into prison. Will Joseph take occasion by the world's extremity, and his brethren's need to use his power in taking vengeance? Nature might act thus, but grace will take another way. Joseph will use his place of supremacy and power for universal blessing. But while showing grace he will maintain righteousness, hence a cry of need will be wrung from the Gentiles and they must submit themselves to Joseph before the blessing is received. So too repentance must precede blessing in the case of the brethren.

NEED AWAKENED

During the days of plenty the world paid little heed to Joseph. Of his brethren we hear nothing, they were wholly indifferent to him. When, however, the dearth set in, need is awakened; "the land of Egypt was famished" (v. 55); and Jacob and his sons are faced with starvation and death (Genesis 42:1-2). The need calls forth a cry for bread, and the Gentiles have to learn, and the brethren discover, that none can meet the need save the one that once they scorned and rejected. The Gentiles must "go to Joseph," and the brethren must bow themselves before him with their faces to the earth (Genesis 41:55; Genesis 42:6). The once rejected but now exalted man is alone the resource alike for Gentile nations as for Jacob and his sons. THE ONE RESOURCE

All this, however, speaks plainly of things to come. There fast approaches "the hour of temptation (i.e. trial) which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth" (Revelation 3:10), and for the Jew the time of "great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world" (Matthew 24:21). "Alas!" says the prophet Jeremiah, "for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jeremiah 30:7). And in that day of unprecedented trial

the one resource will be the exalted Christ, who, in the days of His humiliation, was rejected and crucified by Jew and Gentile. THE STOREHOUSES OF BLESSING

Both Jew and Gentile will pass through seas of misery in their attempts to bring about prosperity and peace in a world from which God and His Christ are excluded. But not until the Gentile submits to Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords, and the Jew at last confesses, "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord," will the time of blessing be reached. Then the exalted Christ will, like Joseph of old, open "all the storehouses," of blessing.

DEEPER TRIBULATION

There is, however, in the story of Joseph, a great difference in the treatment meted out to the Gentiles and in his dealings with his brethren. The Gentiles have truly to learn their need and submit to Joseph before the storehouses of blessing are opened. The guilt, however, of the brethren was far greater than the guilt of the Gentiles, and the exercises must be correspondingly deeper that bring them to repentance Deform they obtain the blessing. And so, too, Scripture makes it abundantly plain that the Jew, with the deeper guilt of having crucified their own Messiah will pass through far deeper tribulation than the Gentile before obtaining the millennial blessing under Christ.

DEEPER EXERCISES

These deeper exercises of the Jew are foreshadowed in Joseph’s dealings with his brethren, as detailed in the chapters that follow. Under the stress of famine Jacob has to say to his sons, "Why do ye look one upon another?" They are in desperate plight, and this much they realize, there is no help in one another. If help is to come it must be from one outside themselves. Hence the ten brethren come to Egypt and present themselves before Joseph.

CHANGED CIRCUMSTANCES

Time was when Joseph was a weak and helpless youth in the hands of his elder brethren. What could a youth do in the power of ten men? And in those far-off days they were not slow to use their power to gratify the hatred and envy that filled their hearts. Twenty years have rolled by; circumstances have changed; Joseph is exalted; his brethren bow before him — ten helpless, needy men. What can ten strangers do in the presence of the all-powerful governor of Egypt? The day of humiliation is past, the day of power has come. How will Joseph use his power? Will he condemn his brethren to hard bondage even as he had suffered bondage at their hands? Human nature might prompt such a course, vengeance might delight in it, justice might be pleaded for it. On the other hand, nature might suggest a very different course; could not Joseph act with generosity and entirely overlook the sin of his brethren, even as Esau. the man of nature, overlooked his brother’s wrong in an earlier day? Nature can often talk in an airy way of letting bygones be bygones and seek to exalt itself by a show of generosity. Joseph, however, will take another way. The conduct that seems so highly commendable in the eyes of the natural man has no attraction for the man that fears God.

LOVE DIRECTING This was the secret of Joseph’s life. Through all the vicissitudes of his path from youth to old age he was governed, not by the dictates of nature, but by the holy fear of God. Thus it is in the presence of his brethren he can say, "I fear God" (v. 18). This is the secret spring

of all his actions. His thoughts, his words, his ways, were governed by the fear of God. Nature leaves God out and thinks only of self-vindication, self-gratification, or self-exaltation. Faith thinks of God and what is pleasing and due to God. Joseph seeks to "serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (Hebrews 12:28). In the day of his temptation he was kept from the path of evil by the fear of God, for he could say, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" In the day of his exaltation he is kept from taking vengeance on his brethren by the fear of God. No sorrows in the day of his humiliation, no glories in the day of his exaltation are allowed to move his soul from the fear of God. He knew how to be abased, and he knew how to abound. Be the circumstances sad or bright, he ever kept God between himself and his circumstances. Thus walking in God’s fear he takes God’s way with his brethren, and God’s way was a way of love, and yet not the way of mere human love, which is often a feeble and failing thing, even as men say, "Love is blind." Divine love with its clear vision is not blind to the faults in the objects of love, but rather, in full recognition of all that is contrary to itself, it sets to work to remove every blemish, so that at length it can rest with satisfaction in its object.

LOVE DISCERNING

Moreover, love is quick to discern. Multitudes from surrounding nations were driven by need to the feet of Joseph, but directly these ten men appear before him love discerns that they are his brethren, as we read, "Joseph saw his brethren." For twenty years he had not seen them, but with love’s quick perception he sees in those ten needy men the brethren from whom he had so long been parted. And love "knew them." "Joseph knew his brethren, but they knew him not" (v. 8). Love knew their past history and the present need that brought them to his feet.

LOVE REMEMBERING And love knew, because love "remembered." "Joseph remembered the dreams which he had dreamed of them" (verse 9). The dreams of the past, the anger and scorn with which they had been received by the brethren, the treatment they had meted out to him, all is remembered, but remembered by one that loves them, for, as Joseph speaks with them "He turned himself about." Time will come when ail the pent-up affections of Joseph will flow out without restraint as he weeps before them, but ere that moment comes he has other work to do. Love will set itself to work to win their hearts and set them in perfect ease in the presence of the one against whom they had so greatly sinned. To reach this end love will find a way whereby, in righteousness, every stain on the past can be wiped away, so that with every question entirely settled nothing will remain to hinder its outflow between Joseph and his brethren. There is, however, only one way whereby the heart can be set at perfect ease in the presence of one that has been offended. All must be brought to light and fully confessed. The slumbering conscience must be aroused, the sins recalled, and the sins confessed. It is only through the conscience that the heart can be reached and set at ease. Moved by love, Joseph will et himself to reach their consciences. He "made himself strange unto them, and spake roughly unto them" (v. 7).

LOVE ALLURING

Christ after the same fashion made Himself strange in the day when a Gentile woman was driven by her need into His presence and was met by silence, for we read, "He answered her not a word." And when He does speak, is it not, for the moment, "hard things" that she has to hear? But we know it was the way of perfect love that led to blessing. So too in His future dealings with the Jew, Christ will make Himself strange when according to the prophet He will say, "I will hedge up thy

way with thorns, and make a wall that she shall not find her paths"; and says the Lord, "I will take away my corn in the time thereof." The Lord will bring famine upon the Jew, in order to bring the Jew into the wilderness, where they have no resources but God. In that wilderness place the Lord can say, "I will speak to her heart" (Hosea 2:6, Hosea 2:9, Hosea 2:14).

LOVE TESTING The brethren protest that it is their need that brings them into Egypt. "We have come to buy food" (v. 10). They have indeed come to the right person, but they have come with a wrong plan and with a wrong plea. Their plan is to buy, and their plea, "We are true men" (v. 11). As yet they know neither the love of Joseph's heart, nor the evil of their own hearts. They must learn that Joseph is too rich to sell to his own, and that they have nothing in themselves to plead. Their money shall not buy corn, and of merit they have none whereby to claim it. They must learn that while Joseph is ready to bestow every blessing, he is one upon whom they have forfeited every claim. Love is a giver when worthlessness has nothing to plead. The love of Joseph's heart will shut out all mere barter, and the evil of their hearts exclude all plea of merit. If they think they are true men then Joseph will put them to the test.

LOVE TEACHING

Moreover Joseph's brethren must learn that all their blessing depends upon the man of whom they say "one is not" (verse 13). They say, as it were, "We have not seen him for twenty years; he has entirely passed out of our lives, as far as we are concerned 'He is not.'" So, too, in a day to come the Jew will have to learn that all their blessing depends upon One that they have set at naught. "This is the stone which was set at naught of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:11-12).

LOVE CONVICTING The brethren have condemned themselves out of their own lips. They have protested that they are true men, and in the same breath they say, "one is not," knowing full well that if Joseph has passed out of their existence it is entirely owing to their own wickedness. They stand in the presence of the one that they had rejected with unrepentant hearts, and yet protest they are honest men. Joseph now takes the first step to convict them of their sin, by putting them into prison. The fear of losing their lives had brought them in Egypt, with the result that they lose their liberty. For three days they are left in prison that they may learn in some measure what their sins merit. Joseph had been thrown into prison unjustly, but they are justly brought into the same condemnation. The result is conscience begins to work, for they say. "We are guilty concerning our brother — (verse 21). Conscience connects their present trouble with their past sin. The prison has so far done its work. They not only say, "We are verily guilty," but "We are verily guilty concerning our brother." We saw the anguish of his soul, but we hardened our hearts. He besought us but we stopped our ears to all his entreaties, "Therefore is this distress come upon us." They rightly connect their present distress with the past sin of twenty years ago.

LOVE WEEPING But all this awakening of conscience, while so far good, is only amongst themselves. It must all come out before Joseph if they are ever to be happy in the presence of Joseph. Hence Joseph will keep his hand upon them. Simeon is bound before their eyes, but it is love that binds the cords round Simeon, for even as he does so he turns aside to weep. The cords that bound him were cords of love. Moreover, he commanded that their sacks be filled with corn. He is not unmindful of their needs and thus grants a measure of relief; none the less Simeon is

held in bondage. And in the way Joseph meets their needs he is still leading his brethren a further stage in their restoration, for while supplying them with corn he returns every man his money. Had they eyes to see they would learn in this that Joseph was a giver. But in their condition gifts bestowed only arouse deeper fear. Their hearts fail them at the discovery of their money. "What is this that God hath done unto us?" (verse 28). They have recalled their sin, now they see that God is dealing with them. The fear of God is arising in their souls. Not indeed that holy fear that marked Joseph. "They feared because they were offenders; he feared lest he should offend." So again when they had returned to Jacob, and each finds his money in his sack, "they were afraid." The goodness of Joseph should have gladdened their hearts, but they are miserable and afraid in the presence of a goodness that their guilty consciences tell them they do not deserve.

LOVE MISUNDERSTOOD

Jacob is not guilty, like his sons, but his feeble faith can see no trace of the hand of God in all these circumstances. As he hears the story of his sons' experiences he can only say, "All these things are against me." How different the language of faith which can say, "All things work together for good to them that love God." The very things that to sight and nature were against him were the very means that God was taking for his blessing. "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away." These are the things that were for him. Joseph lost to his father, rejected and sold, imprisoned and exalted, Simeon held in bondage, Benjamin taken from his father, were all stages in the pathway to blessing, and means used by God to restore Joseph to his father and to bring Jacob and his sons into richer blessing. Yet Jacob is saying to his sons, "Then shall ye bring down my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave." At the very moment when Jacob could see nothing in the future but sorrow and the grave, God was about to bring him into joy and blessing. Had Jacob been able to persist in his thoughts he would have thwarted God in His ways of blessing, for says Jacob, "My son shall not go down."

There is a need-be for each pain, And He will one day make it plain That earthly loss is heavenly gain.

Like as a piece of tapestry, Viewed from the back appears to be Naught but threads tangled hopelessly. But in the front a picture fair Rewards the worker for his care, Proving his skill and patience rare.

Thou art the workman, I the frame;

Lord, for the glory of Thy name, Perfect Thine image on the same.

53 The Brethren Tested Genesis 43:1-34 & Genesis 44:1-34 The sin of Joseph's brethren has been recalled; their conscience has been awakened; the fear of God has arisen in their souls. There are, however, other experiences they must pass through before Joseph can reveal himself in all the love of his heart, and ere his brethren can be at perfect ease in his presence. A GROSS DECEPTION In the past they had sinned, not only against Joseph, but also against their father. They had been "reckless of a brother's cries and of a father's grief." They had sinned as brethren before their brother, they had sinned as sons before their father. One they had treated with the utmost cruelty, the other with the grossest deception. Both as sons and as brethren they had revealed the evil of their way and the hardness of their hearts. The time has come when they will be tested, and Joseph will prove how far any real change has been wrought in them. They have

said, "We are true men." Joseph will therefore place them in circumstances that will reveal whether at last they can let as true brothers, and true sons. With the utmost wisdom Joseph will re-enact the past. Once again ten men will have to act in regard to a younger brother. Once again they shall have to face an aged father with his great love for the younger son. A GREAT QUESTION

Times have changed and circumstances have altered; the setting of the picture is entirely new, but in principle the story of the fields of Dothan is to be enacted in the land of Egypt. Will those ten men once again abandon their brother, and invent some story to deceive their father? Has true repentance been wrought in the hearts of those brethren? This is the great question that Joseph will solve in their second visit to Egypt. A GRACIOUS PURPOSE

Again it is their desperate need that brings them into Egypt. Before starting they make their plans to appease the Governor of Egypt and to secure the safety of Benjamin. Judah undertakes to be surety for Benjamin, and the present is arranged for the Governor. The former goodness of Joseph in returning their money is looked upon as a possible "oversight" (v. 12). All shows how impossible it is for nature to understand the ways of grace. "Why," says Jacob, speaking after the manner of the natural man, "tell the man whether ye had a brother?" (v. 6). Their reply shows the way that grace had taken, "The man asked very closely after us, and of our kindred" (New Tr.). Grace can forgive all, but grace will have all brought to light (v. 7). A GENERAL PROPOSITION

Then Israel unfolds his plan. And, man of faith though he was, he speaks now according to the man of nature. "If it must be so, do this." Jacob’s plan depends upon man’s doings. He needs corn, he would fain obtain the release of Simeon and secure the safety of Benjamin, and he proposes a way whereby all shall be brought about by their own doings. And this is still the way man takes, and has ever taken, to obtain blessing from God. Cain took this way when he brought the firstfruits of his own labours as an offering unto the Lord. Israel took this way when they said, "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do." The lawyer of New Testament times would take this same way when, in the presence of the Lord, he said, "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And after nineteen hundred years of grace man still clings to this fatal way, for, in the closing days of Christendom, there are still those of whom we read, "They have gone in the way of Cain." A GENEROUS PRESENT

Occupied thus with their own doings, Jacob unfolds his plan. "Take," says he, "a present" to appease the man. "Take double money" to buy the corn. "Take also your brother, and arise, go again unto the man." Nature cannot think of God as a giver, or man as a receiver. Nature has no true knowledge of God or man. It cannot conceive of God so rich in sovereign grace that He can only give, or man so helplessly ruined that he can only receive. But this Jacob and his sons must learn, for all their plans entirely fail to secure the blessing at the hands of Joseph. A GRAVE MISTAKE

Furthermore, we learn in the story that not only are man’s plans utterly futile but that occupation with our plans blinds the soul to the grace of God. Jacob, as he thinks of the goodness of Joseph that had returned their money, can only imagine "it was an oversight." There is, however, no oversight with God. The oversight is all on man’s side. Blinded by his own doings he overlooks what God is doing (11-23) A GLOOMY UNCERTAINTY

Having made all his plans, Jacob finally commends is sons to the mercy of God Almighty. He puts his plans first and God Almighty second. If there is anything lacking in his plans he expresses the pious hope that the mercy of God will make up the deficiency. And thus it is that men treat God and Christ today. God in mercy sent His Son, Christ accomplished the mighty work of redemption, but still man clings to his own doings and looks upon the mercy of God and the work of Christ as mere make-weights to fill up any little shortcomings in man's endeavours. But as with Jacob, so with men. Their own plans leave them in hopeless uncertainty. Jacob had to confess that after all he is quite uncertain of the results. "If I be bereaved, I am bereaved" (14). What a picture of man's way of seeking to obtain blessing from God. Do your best, look to the mercy of God to make up For any failure in your efforts, and then hope for the best in the future, and if you are saved you will be saved, and if you are condemned you will be condemned. A GRAND RECEPTION The brethren of Joseph proceed to act upon their father's plan only to realize its utter futility. They took the present, they took double money, and Benjamin, rose up and went down to Egypt and stood before Joseph (15). Joseph pays not the slightest heed to their gifts, he does not touch their money, he will not accept Benjamin as a ransom. He entirely ignores their plan and commences to act according to his own heart. First, he says, "Bring those men home, and slay and make ready; for these men shall dine with me." Is this not an anticipation of that far greater message that God sends to a world of sinners, "Come, for all things are now ready"? The purposes of Joseph far transcend the plans of his brethren. Their plan was simply to obtain a blessing from Joseph; his purpose was to bestow a blessing, but a blessing that they should enjoy in his company and in his home. Their plan was to buy corn to make a feast among themselves, his plan to spread a feast to be enjoyed with him. "These men," he says, "shall dine with me" (v. 16). Like the brethren of Joseph we are equally slow to take in God's thoughts of blessing. We would be content to obtain the forgiveness of sins, and salvation from hell. But how far short of God's thoughts! His thought is to have us with Himself to feast with Him in His home. The prodigal was driven by his need, and some small sense of grace, to return to the father, hoping to get his need met and possibly the place of a servant in the father's house. But no servant's place will suit the father's heart. The prodigal must be brought into the father's home as the father's son, there to feast and make merry with the father. If God sends out the Gospel it is to secure a vast host of redeemed sinners to be in His presence holy and without blame before Him in love. A GUILTY SUSPICION But we are slow to take in the greatness of God's grace. Even as Joseph's brethren, who "were afraid" when they were brought into Joseph's house. They could only think they were brought in to be condemned, they could not imagine they were brought in to be feasted. Thus they said, "It is because of the money that was returned in our sacks . . . are we brought in," They looked upon Joseph as against them, as one that must be appeased. They had yet to learn that he is making all things work together for good. Instead of judging themselves they are judging Joseph. In all these marks of favour they can only imagine that Joseph is seeking occasion against them — is going to fall upon them and make them bondmen (vv. 17, 18). A GROUNDLESS EXPLANATION

They explain to the steward that they have brought double money. But though knowing all about it he sets all on one side and brings Simeon to them (vv. 19, 23). Still clinging to their own efforts they make ready their present "against Joseph came at noon," only to find that Joseph in his turn sets it all aside. The money and the present entirely fail to effect anything (vv. 25, 26). A GRIEVOUS EXPERIENCE

Joseph speaks kindly to them, yearns in love over is younger brother, weeps in love in secret, but restrains himself in love, for love's time to reveal itself has not yet come. Even so, in perfect wisdom does the Lord deal with the woman by the well. He does not reveal Himself until her conscience is reached and is out, and she discovers that she is in the presence of One who, knowing her whole history, yet loves her with such a love that He can say to her, "Come hither.'' Then she can say, "Is not this the Christ?" Joseph will anticipate these perfect ways of grace with a poor sinner. He too speaks words of grace, but restrains himself in the presence of his brethren. He will feast them, but in such a way that they cannot but see their history is known. They are set before him, "the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth." In the enjoyment of all this favour, "they drank and were merry with him," but they must learn other lessons before he can be merry with them. They are rejoicing in his gifts, but they have yet to rejoice in himself (vv. 27, 34). However, before Joseph can be revealed to them they must be exposed before Joseph. To this end Joseph's cup is placed in Benjamin's sack. The brethren having departed are pursued by Joseph's steward, and charged with having taken the cup. They protest their innocence. "God forbid that thy servants should do according to this thing." Then they profess their honesty. "Behold, the money which we found in our sacks' mouths we brought again . . . how then should we steal?" Is it likely that men who deal so honestly in money matters would be guilty of a paltry theft? It must be remembered that these are the men who once sold their brother into slavery for twenty paltry pieces of silver. Surely men who had acted thus would be quite capable of stealing a silver cup, in spite of all protestations to the contrary. The charge is not therefore so unreasonable, unless indeed full repentance for the past has been wrought in their souls. That they are innocent of the matter of the cup, Joseph knows full well, but have they repented of the past? This Joseph will find out. In the past they had been neither true sons nor true brothers. Has repentance done its work? Has the heart of stone been changed to a heart of flesh?

GRUELLING TEST

Benjamin stands in the place that once had been Joseph's — the youngest and best-loved son of his father. Benjamin shall pass into bondage, as once Joseph had filled the place of a slave. The ten brothers are perfectly free, as once before, to return to their father in peace. What will they do in these circumstances? Will they again act as in the days of old in the fields of Dothan? Will they abandon their brother to slavery knowing him to be innocent? They had acted thus with Joseph; will they do so with Benjamin? Will they return to Jacob to face his grief with some false story to account for the absence of Benjamin as once they had accounted for the loss of Joseph? Ah, no! grace has wrought in these men, repentance has done its work. Under the searching questions of Joseph the whole truth is confessed. Joseph can say, "What deed is this that ye have done?" "Wot ye not that such a man as I can certainly make trial?" (6-15, marg). And this is ever the way grace takes. Thus it was the Lord dealt with a sinful woman "near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph." "Go call thy husband" was only another way of saying, "What deed is this that ye have done?" and how truly He made Himself known to that guilty sinner as the One that can "certainly divine," for she said, "He told me all things that ever I did." And none can be happy and at home in the presence of the Lord of glory until such times as they have learnt that the Lord knows the very worst thing bout them, and yet loves them. A GENUINE CONFESSION This too, is the way Joseph takes, and with what blessed results! No longer do they justify themselves. They exclaim, "What shall we say unto my lord? What shall we speak? or how shall we clear ourselves?

God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants: behold, we are my lord’s servants!" They no longer attempt to justify themselves as to the present, they do not attempt to clear themselves as to the past. They are convicted sinners "found out" by God; and they entirely submit to Joseph, "we are my lord’s servants," they say (16). A GRIPPING APPEAL This indeed is excellent, but these are words and may be but empty profession. Words must be proved by deeds. Judah, therefore, comes forward on behalf of the brethren, and proves the reality of their words by what they are prepared to do. He can say, "Let thy servant abide instead of the lad a bondman to my lord; and let the lad go up with his brethren." More over, the pleading love that breathes throughout Judah’s touching appeal proves how deep the repentance that has been wrought in their souls. The heart of stone has indeed been changed into a heart of flesh. As a son he pleads for Jacob. He is our father, he is an old man, he loves Benjamin (20), "his life is bound up in the lad’s life" (30). How can "I see the evil that shall come on my father"? (34). As a true brother he pleads for Benjamin. He is "a lad," "a little one" (v. 20), "our youngest brother." But this appeal to Joseph shows that not only repentance has been wrought but confidence has been in measure won. A beautiful picture of that "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" which always accompanies a true work of grace.

Listen, oh, listen, my Father, all holy, Humble and sorrowful, owning my sin, Hear me confess in my penitence lowly How in my weakness temptation came in.

Pity me now, for, my Father, no sorrow Weighs on my soul like the pain that I know, Trembling and fearing that all thro’ the morrow Missing the light of Thy love I may go.

Father, I know for the grace I am seeking, Nothing or mine can I offer to Thee;

Thou to my sinful and sad spirit speaking, Giving forgiveness — giv’st all things to me.

Thoughts of my sinfulness contrite shall make me, Thoughts of Thy favour shall humble me more; So keep me lowly until Thou shalt take me Where sin and sorrow forever are o’er.

Anon.

7 Reconciliation Genesis 45:1

Hitherto Joseph has made himself strange, spoken roughly, and dealt grievously with his brethren, for here was conscience work to be done and repentance to be wrought. But love’s strange work being accomplished, Joseph can no longer refrain from making himself known. Having exposed the guilt of their hearts, he must make known the love of his heart. Have they discovered the evil of their hearts, then he sill disclose the yet greater grace of his heart, that, knowing all their evil, can rise above it in full, free forgiveness. THE REVELATION OF JOSEPH

Joseph must make "himself known" (v. 1). Nothing less will satisfy his heart; nothing less will give rest to their hearts. And this is still the way of the loving Saviour with the anxious sinner. Nothing will roll away the burden of guilt but the discovery that all is fully known, and fully forgiven, by the One against whom we have sinned. The knowledge of our hearts, however necessary, will bring no rest to the soul. We may mourn over the past, and weary ourselves with our sins, but no discovery of evil in our hearts, no repentance, however real, no sorrow for sin, however sincere, will bring comfort to the soul. For rest and peace Jesus must make Himself known. Then we discover with great delight that His heart is full of grace for man that is full of sin. That with the full

knowledge of all our sins there is nothing but love in His heart towards us. Then we can rest but we rest in what He is and not in anything we find in ourselves. For such discoveries of His heart we must be alone with Him. Even so Joseph, before he could make himself known, has to say, "Cause every man to go out from me" (verse 1). Wonderful moment in the history of our souls when all men fade from view and we see "no man any more save Jesus only"; when alone with Him in the consciousness of our sinfulness, we discover that He knows us through and through, and yet knowing us, He loves us. The woman of Sychar finely illustrates such a moment. Alone in His presence He revealed all the sin of her heart — told her all things that ever she did — and then disclosed Himself as the Christ full of grace and truth, for a sinner full of sin. He knows all that she ever did, but, He says, "I that speak unto thee am Christ." She finds herself a sinner exposed in the presence of the Christ of God, but instead of repelling her He can say, "Come hither." He seems to say, "I know the worst about you, and though your sin has made you a lonely woman — though it makes you shrink from the company of your fellow-women — yet you are welcome to Me — Come hither." THE RECEPTION OF HIS BRETHREN

Such ways of grace are blessedly foreshadowed in the history of Joseph. Alone with his brethren he at once declares, "I am Joseph." And as the Lord could say to the woman, "Come hither," Joseph can say to his brethren, "Come near to me" (verse 4). It is not only that Joseph is ready to forgive, but he desires the company of those he forgives. We rejoice in the grace that meets our need, but how slow to realize that the One who has removed our guilt desires our company; Christ has come near to us that we might come near to Him. When passing through this world "He ordained twelve, that they should be with Him." When He left the world, He "died for us that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him"; and when He comes again to receive us unto Himself it is that we may for ever be "with the Lord." If love makes us suited to His company, love will not be content without our company. THE REMOVAL OF FEAR

Moreover, if the brethren are to be in the company of Joseph for the satisfaction of his heart, they must be there without a trace of fear, without a single regret, and without a shade of care. No regrets for the past, no fears in the present, no anxieties for the future must rise up to mar the joy of communion between Joseph and his restored brethren. With infinite skill Joseph will remove their fears, banish their regrets, and relieve their anxieties. THE REASSURANCE OF LOVE That they did fear is evident enough, for we read, "they were troubled at his presence" (verse 3). Joseph, however, draws them to himself with the cords of love; "Come near to me," he says. "And they came near." And having drawn them to himself, he seeks to remove every fear by reminding them he is still their brother, "I am Joseph your brother.'' He says, as it were, "I know full well how you treated me in the days that are past, you hated me, you spurned me, you sold me, but fear not, I am Joseph your brother. I know, too, that the day of my exaltation is come, and though you see me — the very one you rejected — in the lace of power, fear not, for though I am supreme, I m still Joseph your brother." THE REMEMBRANCE OF THE PAST

Moreover, as to the past, Joseph cannot allow that any regrets should rise up to mar their enjoyment of his love. Now therefore, says Joseph, be not grieved nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither" (verse 5). The sin had been confessed, and Joseph will not only forgive, but he will remove all lingering regrets and self-reproaches. He will assure them that behind their sin, yea, by means of their sin, God was working out His purposes of blessing. It is true, "You sold me hither," Joseph has to say, but he adds, "God sent me before you to save your lives by a great

deliverance." Thus he delivers his brethren from occupation with themselves by engaging their thoughts and affections with himself, his glories, and the blessings that flow to them through his exaltation. THE RELIEF FROM ANXIETY

Then as to the future no care or anxiety need cloud their horizon, for Joseph can say, in the message he sends to his father, "Thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near to me, thou, and thy children and thy children’s children, and all that thou hast, and there will I nourish thee" (v. 10). THE REALIZATION OF LOVE

Thus with marvellous skill and infinite love, Joseph makes himself known to his brethren, dispels their fears, delivers them from self-occupation, and relieves them from anxiety, by filling their vision with himself and his glories, and engaging their thoughts with his gracious words. "Behold," says Joseph, "your eyes see . . . that it is my mouth that speaketh unto you" (v. 12). Fear dispelled, grief assuaged cares banished, love can flow without hindrance — "He kissed all his brethren"; "and after that his brethren talked with him" (v. 15). But their eyes have seen his glories, their ears have been charmed with his words of grace, their hearts have been warmed with his love and, in the warmth of love, they are set free to talk with him. No shade remains to hinder the communion of love between Joseph and his brethren. Perfect love casts out fear. All this foreshadows the yet future dealings of Christ with His earthly people who rejected Him in the days of old. But more, the story tells us the say Christ takes to teach us the evil of our hearts, and then to dispel all fear by making Himself known in the love of His heart. THE RECALLING OF HIS DEALINGS

Moreover, we do well to remember that before Joseph "made himself known" to his brethren, "he made himself strange unto them" (Genesis 42:7). That they might learn the evil of their hearts, he "made himself strange"; that they might learn the love of his heart he "made himself known." Cannot many Christians recall a time in the history of their souls when Christ appeared to make Himself strange and deal roughly with them as they were left to travel through some dark valley of soul exercise, there to discover the evil of the flesh within? In such moments many a dark passage in life’s history will rise up to confront the soul in all its hideousness and hatefulness, until the cry is wrung from the soul, "Behold I am vile" (Job 40:4). But even so this is not enough, for, as Job found, there is a deeper lesson to learn, and for this we must travel back outside the range of our personal experience until we reach the solemnities of the cross. There may have been plenty of evil in the lives of Joseph’s brethren, but if they are to learn the depth of evil in their hearts, they must go back over twenty years of history to recall their treatment of Joseph, when in the face of his love as a brother, they hated him, cast him into a pit, and sold him into Egypt. So with ourselves. Truly, we have to learn that in the flesh is no good thing — that it is irremediably bad — we must go to the cross. At the cross there was the display of perfect goodness in God and perfect goodness in a Man — the Man Christ Jesus. At the cross grace and love, and goodness shone out in all their splendour. How did the flesh act in the presence of perfect goodness? It utterly refused the One in whom goodness was displayed. It rejected Him, spat in His face, mocked Him with a crown of thorns, nailed Him to a cross, and cast Him out of the world. Every one of us was represented at the cross, for every class of man was there, religious and godless, educated and ignorant, refined and rough, all were there, and all rejected the Christ of God. Each can say, "There I see my flesh — myself — brought face to face with perfect goodness, and without hesitation my flesh — whatever form it takes — declares its utter hatred of goodness." As one has

said, "The sight of a rejected Christ has discovered myself to myself, the deepest recesses of my heart are laid bare, and self, horrible self is there." Learning the flesh experimentally, 1 discover its lusts and covetousness, its pride and vanity. In a word, I discover by bitter experience that the flesh loves evil. But when I come to the cross I learn more terrible phase of its character, for there I discover that the flesh within hates good. THE REFUSAL OF SELF

Moreover, in result, the difference is great between learning the character of the flesh experimentally and learning it in the light of God revealed at the cross. If I only know the flesh as I discover it in myself, I may be left with the thought that it can be improved. I may admit that it is vile — that it loves evil — but I may say, "Is it not possible to improve and reform it?" It is possible to do a great deal for man in the flesh in the way of cultivation and reformation, but in the end it is farther from God than ever. This great lesson I learn at the cross. There Christ was not only the song of the drunkard but the sober men — the men who sat in the gate — "speak against Him." Drunk or sober the flesh hates God, and Christ in whom God was expressed. Thus the cross proves the flesh to be irremediably bad. A man that loves sin might be improved, but a man that hates perfect goodness is beyond improvement. When we reach this point, we can say with Job, not only "I am vile," but "I abhor myself." We do not abhor a man, however vile, if he is endeavouring to overcome his evil, we rather admire such an one, but when a man is proved to be bad beyond all hope of improvement we rightly abhor him. To this Job had to come, and we, too, in the light of the cross must reach this point when we give ourselves up as hopelessly bad. THE REST OF COMMUNION But when like Job in his day, and the brethren of Joseph in their day, we have learned the evil of our own hearts — the utter corruption of the flesh — with what relief we turn from self to Christ, and how He delights to set us free by making Himself known in all the grace of His heart. We may well be appalled as we discover the evil of our hearts. But as Christ reveals to us His heart and tells us that He loves us, though knowing all the evil of our hearts — as He draws us to Himself and discloses to us the desire of His heart to have us in His company as He gives us to behold His glory and to hear His voice — then the torments of fear are ended by perfect love — the love that casteth out fear — and no more the soul turns in upon itself to grieve over the evil within, the future is no longer dark with dismal forebodings, but in the consciousness of His love we can hold sweet communion with Him, after the manner of Joseph’s brethren who "talked with him,"

8 Service Genesis 45:9-24

Joseph has made himself known to his brethren. He has dispelled their fears, dealt with their past, and secured their future. The love of Joseph has brought his brethren into sweet communion with himself, as we read, "He kissed all his brethren . . . and after that his brethren talked with him" (v. 15). Now we are to learn that the intimacies of love prepare for the service of love. Those whom Joseph has won for himself he will enlist in his service. His brethren shall become his witnesses. THE PREPARATION FOR SERVICE In like manner the Lord deals with the demoniac of the Gospel story. Clothed, in his right mind, and brought to sit at the feet of Jesus — set free by the Word of the Lord — he is prepared for the service of the Lord by the directions from the Lord, for the Lord can say, "Return to thine own house and shew how great things God hath done unto thee" (Luke 8:29; Luke 8:35, Luke 8:39). So too, the Lord deals with His disciples on the evening of the resurrection day. As the true Joseph in the presence of His brethren He makes Himself known to the terrified and affrighted disciples. He speaks to their troubled hearts the word of

peace. Then it is He gives them the great commission and speaks of the high privilege of being His witnesses (Luke 24:48, Acts 1:8). THE PATTERN OF SERVICE As with the brethren of Joseph, the demoniac of a later day, and the disciples of the resurrection day, so with ourselves, preparation for service must precede service. We are oftentimes more anxious to be used than exercised to be "meet for the Master's use, and prepared for every good work." Further, our preparation for service is only gained as we are found alone with Christ learning His mind in communion with Him and in the realization of His love. How touchingly is this prefigured in the fine scene between Joseph and his brethren, when, apart from all others, "he kissed all his brethren . . . and after that his brethren talked with him" (v. 15). The measure of holy separation to the Lord is the measure of our preparation for His service. They who would serve acceptably must first sit at His feet and hear His Word. There only, in the secret of His presence, can we learn His mind and thus serve under His directions. It was thus with the brethren of Joseph; all their directions as to service came from Joseph. Not one of the brethren suggested service. And when Joseph speaks of service, they do not set one another to serve, nor decide how to serve, to whom they shall go, or where they shall go, or what they shall say. The commission to serve, and every detail of the service, they receive from the lips of Joseph. THE PROMPTNESS IN SERVICE

First, Joseph presses upon them the urgency of their mission. "Haste ye" is the word with which he sends them forth, and in like manner the exhortation for these days — the last days — is "Proclaim the Word, be urgent in season, and out of season" (2 Timothy 4:2). THE PLACE OF SERVICE

Second, not only are they told how to go, but they are instructed where to go. The word is "Go, get you into the land of Canaan" (v. 17). They were to be witnesses for Joseph in the very land where, in the days of his humiliation, Joseph received only evil for good and hatred for his love: where he had been stripped of his honours, flung into a pit, and sold for twenty pieces of silver. And thus it was in that last parting scene between the risen Lord and His glad disciples. They not only receive a commission to preach repentance and remission of sins among all nations, but they are instructed where to begin. The Lord's word is "beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47). The witness was to begin in the blackest spot on earth, and amongst the worst of sinners, in the place where the Lord had been sold for thirty pieces of silver, stripped of His robe, mocked with a crown of thorns, and nailed to a cross between two thieves. As an old servant of the Lord had said, it is "As if the Lord had said, 'Tell them though they have gainsaid My doctrine, blasphemed My divinity, taken away My life, . . . endeavoured to murder My reputation, too, by making Me an impostor, go to Jerusalem, and by beginning there, show them such a miracle of goodness and grace that they themselves must confess that nothing can be greater than their sin except this mercy and grace of Mine which where their sin abounded grace does much more abound.... Begin at Jerusalem, and after the saving efficacy of My grace appears there, no one will question the possibility of their salvation.'" THE PLAN OF SERVICE

Third, they learn from the lips of Joseph to whom they are to carry the message. "Go up to my father" is the direction of Joseph (v. 9). The one they had so grossly deceived, and before whom they had denied all knowledge of Joseph, is the very one before whom they are to bare witness of Joseph. Nor is it otherwise with Christ and His disciples. The woman of Sychar goes back to the men of the city to bear a bright witness for Christ before those who well knew the manner of her life. In the very place of her sin she is to bear witness to the One who has set her free from sin (John 4:28-29). Peter, too, bears witness to Christ before those in whose presence he had once so

shamefully denied Christ. Moreover, it is not only to the father that Joseph’s brethren are sent, but to the father’s children and the children’s children, indeed, says Joseph, tell him the good news is for "All that thou hast" (v. 10). And the message is still, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved and thy house." THE PERSUASION IN SERVICE

Fourth, the brethren of Joseph are sent back with a very definite message to be delivered with all the authority of Joseph’s word. It was to be introduced with a "Thus saith thy son Joseph" (v. 9). We do well to remember that the power behind the Gospel message is the authority with which it is proclaimed. It roes forth with a "Thus saith the Lord." THE POSITIVENESS IN SERVICE

Fifth, the great theme of the message was Joseph and his glory. Tell my father, Joseph can say, that "God hath made me lord of all Egypt" (v. 9). And he adds, "Ye shall tell my father of all my glory, and of all that ye have seen" (v. 13). This is still the message that alone will meet the world’s famine. Peter preached it with no uncertain sound in the ears of the Jews when, on the day of Pentecost, he said, "Let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." And again before the Gentiles he can say that Christ "is Lord of all" (Acts 2:36; Acts 10:36). Moreover it is still our privilege to declare the glories of the One who is Lord of all, whether it be His personal glories as the eternal Son, His moral glories as the One who is altogether lovely, or His official glories as King of kings and Lord of lords. THE PROCLAMATION IN SERVICE

Sixth, the message that Joseph sends to Jacob is "Come down unto me" (v. 9). If Joseph is lord of all with the riches of glory at his disposal for all yet it is only those who "come" who obtain the blessing. If all power is in his hands to bless, all grace is in his heart to attract to himself — the blesser. Joseph says in effect to his father, "I want you," for it is not only "Come," but "Come down unto me." THE PURPOSE IN SERVICE

Seventh, the message speaks of the blessings that await those who "come" (vv. 10, 11) . If Jacob will but come the days of his wandering will be past, for, says Joseph, "Thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen", distance and estrangement will be no more, for "thou shalt be near unto me"; care and want will be banished, for "there will I nourish thee." Still the Lord of glory can say, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." The soul that comes to Him will find the days of the wandering feet are over, the loneliness of the desolate heart is ended, and the famine of the distant land is met. In the company of Christ there is rest for the conscience. satisfaction for the heart, and food for the soul. THE POINT IN SERVICE

Finally, the message carries with it a word of warning. There is untold blessing for those who come, there is imminent danger for those who delay. Hence Joseph’s word is "Tarry not . . . lest thou, and thy household, and all that thou hast, come to poverty" (vv. 9, 11). How far greater the danger if we trifle with that far greater message that comes from the Lord in glory! Well may the apostle ask, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" And again, "If they escaped not who refused Him who spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven" (Hebrews 2:3; Hebrews 12:25). If the message of grace opens up a vista of glory with its rest, and satisfaction, and plenty, it also warns those who reject the message that there is nothing before them but the poverty of hell where there is no God, no Christ, and no hope. THE PLATFORM IN SERVICE

Such is the message that Joseph sends to his father foreshadowing the Gospel message which the believer carries to the world from Christ the Lord of all.

It is an urgent message, "Haste ye."

It is a message that proclaims the exaltation and glory of the Lord of all.

It is a message of grace that says, "Come."

It is a message that tells of the blessings for those who "come."

It is a message of warning to those who refuse to come. THE POWER FOR SERVICE

Continuing the story of Joseph we discover further rich instructions for the servant of the Lord. The message is full and clear, but it is not enough to be entrusted with a message, the messenger must be fully equipped to deliver the message. The disciples whom the Lord commissioned to preach had to tarry until endued with power from on high. And again the Lord can say, "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto Me" (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8). The power in which they are to serve comes from the Person who lives them their commission, and from the place of Exaltation in which this Person is. Is this not foreshadowed in the story of Joseph? For the word is, "Take you wagons out of the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives, and bring your father and come" (v. 19). They were provided with a newpower to journey on their way. And the power that took them back to Canaan was the power in which they were to bring their father to Joseph. Thus we read, "Joseph gave them wagons" (v. 21). THE PROVISION IN SERVICE

Further, Joseph can say, "Regard not your stuff," or according to a better translation, "Let not your eye regret your stuff" (v. 20). There are things that belong to us naturally — the eloquence of man, and the wisdom of man, and there are carnal means and methods that appeal to the natural man. But, says the apostle, "my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power," and again he can say, "we do not war after the flesh; for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal" (1 Corinthians 2:4; 2 Corinthians 10:3-4). In the service of the Lord that which is merely natural is neither to be regarded nor regretted. The Gospel that we carry is too great and serious for the feebleness of carnal methods and the levity of natural eloquence. THE PROVISION FOR SERVICE

Moreover, had the brethren fallen back on their own "stuff" to support them in their service they would have slighted the provision of Joseph. Their action would have said, "Joseph’s provision is not sufficient for Joseph’s commission." Joseph, however, can say, "The good of the land of Egypt is yours," and, in accord with this, he "gave them provision for the way" (vv. 20, 21). In carrying out their service for Joseph they were sustained by the good of the land from which they came, received from the hand of the one that sent them. Nor is it otherwise in the service of the Lord in this day of His grace. We have received full provision to carry out His service, and hence to import human methods into this service is to cast a slight upon His provision. By so doing we say the Holy Spirit, and spiritual means, is not sufficient for the service of the Lord. Let us then beware of regarding our "stuff’ and neglecting His provision. May we ever remember the words of one who, though in the world’s sight an "unlearned and ignorant" man, could say, "His Divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3). THE PROHIBITION IN

SERVICE

Another lesson we may learn is that, in the service of the Lord, the servant is not only spiritually equipped, but he is dependent upon the Lord for his temporal needs. From the moment Joseph's brethren set forth in their path of service until the day of their return, they were sustained by the provision of Joseph. They were not provided for by the people to whom they were going, but by the person from whom they had come. Apparently they were not to take of Jacob's things to carry out Joseph's work. So in the New Testament we read of those who "for His name's sake . . . went forth taking nothing of the Gentiles" (3 John 1:7). THE PRIVILEGE OF SERVICE But blessed as all this is, it is not enough for the service of the Lord. If the service is to be effectual the life of the servant must be in harmony with the message that he delivers. This important truth is strikingly set forth in the dealing of Joseph with his brethren. Not only did he give them provision for the way, but we read, "To all of them he gave each man changes of raiment" (v. 22). They were not only to deliver a message concerning the glory of Joseph, but they themselves were to be witnesses of the change that the glory effected. And, as we have seen, not only were the apostles sent forth to preach Christ but they themselves were to be witnesses to Christ — "ye shall be witnesses unto Me." "Having put off the old man with his deeds, and having put on the new, renewed into full knowledge according to the image of Him that has created him," it is our privilege and responsibility to display the change of raiment by expressing the character of Christ in all His lovely traits — compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, longsuffering, forbearance, forgiveness and love. THE PERIL IN SERVICE

Finally, Joseph sends forth his brethren with the warning word, "See that ye fall not out by the way" (v. 24). And in those last words of the upper room, when the Lord is equipping His disciples to be His witnesses, He thrice exhorts them to love one another (John 13:34; John 15:12, John 15:17). Alas! we have fallen out by the way. The Galatians by their legality fell out by the way, for the apostle has to say, "Ye bite and devour one another" (Galatians 5:15). The Corinthians by their carnality fell out by the way, for the apostle writes, "There are contentions among you" (1 Corinthians 1:11). And as in the beginning so it has ever been through the long history of that which professes to be a witness for Christ in the earth. Had love prevailed there would have been no room either for legality or carnality to divide the servants of Christ and mar their service to the Lord.

We will love with tender care —

Knowing love to Christ —

Brethren who His image bear — When there's love to Christ.

"Jesus only" shall we know, And our love to all shall flow, In His blood bought church below, For the love of Christ.

Wm. E. Reed 9 Glory and Blessing Genesis 45:25-28, Genesis 46:1-34, Genesis 47:1-31 The brethren of Joseph fulfil their mission according to the directions of Joseph. They "came into the land of Canaan unto Jacob their father, and told him, saying, Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor of all the land of Egypt" (vv. 25, 26). They witness to a living and exalted Joseph, even as today it is the privilege of the believer to witness to the risen and exalted Saviour. A testimony so incredible to the natural mind that it is received with unbelief. Thus it was with Jacob. The

exposure of his unbelief was the first result of hearing the good news. Twenty years before these same men had brought a lying report to Jacob with evidences to support their lie. And without a question Jacob believed the lie. "Without doubt," he said, "Joseph is rent in pieces." Now his sons bring a true report of Joseph with evidences to support the truth, and at once Jacob doubts. His "heart fainted, for he believed them not." Ever since Adam gave his ear to the devil's lie it has been natural for fallen man to believe a lie. Only a work of grace enables men to believe the truth. Hence we read that those who believe on the Name of Christ are born "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." THE CONFESSION OF FAITH

Thus with Jacob, grace overcomes his unbelief. His sons repeat "all the words of Joseph, which he said unto them." Moreover, they show Jacob "the wagons which Joseph sent to carry him." The grace and goodness of Joseph breaks down the unbelief of Jacob. When he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived: and Israel said, "It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive." This is the confession of faith. He believed with his heart and confessed the truth with his lips. Nor is there any other way of blessing for a sinner today. We may indeed at first listen to the good news with unbelief, but as we hear the grace of the words of Christ, and see that all has been done that we might be blessed, our hearts are won — the goodness of God leadeth to repentance — we believe in our hearts. Just as Jacob sees that Joseph has made every provision that he might personally be blessed, so we see that Christ has done a great work that we individually might be saved, and that God is satisfied with that work, for He has raised Christ from the dead. We believe in our hearts and confess Jesus as Lord with our lips, and we are saved (Romans 10:10). THE LANGUAGE OF LOVE

It was Jacob — the man so often marked by unbelief and crooked ways — that could not believe the good news; but directly he uses the language of faith, God gives him his new name "Israel." Jacob expressed all that he was by nature, Israel all that he was by grace. But not only is faith kindled in the heart of Jacob, but love goes out in longing to Joseph — "I will go and see him before I die." This is the language of love that is satisfied with nothing less than the one that is loved. The heart that has been won by the grace of Christ will not be satisfied at a distance. The test of love is — does it desire the company of the one that is loved? Are we content to say, "we shall see Him when He comes, or when we die," or do we say "I will go and see Him before I die." Do you know what it is to seek His company, and taste the joy of His presence before we die? In order to reach Joseph, Israel had to take his journey (Genesis 46:1). He had to leave the scene of all his natural affections. And so with ourselves, if we are to reach Christ where He is, we must forget the things that are behind. Thus Israel comes into the new land — the land of Goshen, and there meets with his son Joseph, and Joseph "presented himself unto him" (v. 29). If on the one hand Israel longs for the company of his son, Joseph on his side is delighted to present himself to Israel. Are we set for the company of Christ, we shall find that Christ is delighted to reveal Himself to us. Do we seek like the two disciples of John 1:1-51 to know Christ in His own dwelling, we shall be welcomed by the gracious words of the Lord, "Come and see" (John 1:38-39). THE REMOVAL OF FEAR

Then Israel can say, "Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive" (v. 30). The man who had always been speaking of death and dreading the grave has now no more fear of death because Joseph is alive. It is as we see that Christ is risen, and as we gaze upon His face and learn His love, our souls will be delivered from the fear of death. THE PURPOSES OF

GOD

Thus Israel and all that he had came to Joseph in exaltation. God’s purposes as set forth in Joseph’s dreams, are brought to pass. What follows will show how Joseph uses his place of universal supremacy For the blessing of those who submit to him. THE INSTRUMENTS OF GRACE

It is deeply instructive to trace the hand of God in every step of Joseph’s path, from the days of his youth when feeding the flock in Canaan, to the day of his glory when set over all the land of Egypt. The varied characters that crossed his path — the father that loved him, the brethren that hated him, the merchants that carried him to Egypt, the captain that promoted him, the woman that traduced him, the jailer that showed him favour, the butler by whom he was forgotten, and the king by whom he was exalted — all were the unconscious instruments to carry out God’s purpose for him. THE WAY OF PREPARATION

So, too, the changing scenes of his life — the fields of Dothan, the empty pit, the house of Potiphar, the prison and the palace — were all stages on his way to glory, even as his varied pursuits, as shepherd, slave, overseer of Potiphar’s house, and keeper of Pharaoh’s prison, prepared him for the use of glory. THE POSITION OF GLORY

It is this use of glory — the way he uses his place of supreme power — that comes before us so strikingly in this portion of Joseph’s story. We see this mighty power put forth in a threefold way —

First, Joseph uses his position of supremacy to bring everything into absolute subjection to himself. All the wealth of Egypt passes into his hands: "Joseph gathered up all the money that was found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan" (vv. 13, 14). Then when the money failed, Joseph claims their cattle. He said, "Give your cattle," and we read, ’’They brought their cattle unto Joseph" (vv. 15-17). Then, the money spent, the cattle gone, they say there is nothing left but "our bodies and our lands" and so they add "buy us and our land for bread." So we read Joseph "bought all the land of Egypt," and "as [or the people, he removed them to cities from one end of the borders of Egypt even to the other end thereof" (vv. 19, 20) . THE SUBJECTION OF THE EARTH

Thus all passes under the absolute control of Joseph — money, cattle, the land, and finally the people themselves. The words of Pharaoh are literally fulfilled: "Without thee shall no man lift up his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt" (Genesis 41:44). Joseph uses his power to bring all into subjection. Never, before or since, have such claims been made by any earthly king. Apart from its typical teaching, the historical fact is without parallel in the history of the world. Many a potentate has made crushing claims, but not one has ever dared to claim all after the manner of Joseph. Moreover, those who have made large claims upon their subjects have been unable to make good their claims; or in the attempt to do so have provoked rebellion and revolution. Joseph, however, not only makes unheard of claims, but he makes good his claims without a voice being raised in rebellion. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THE THRONE

Furthermore, a second great fact is noticeable, that in claiming all, Joseph does so for Pharaoh. If Joseph gathers up all the money, we read he "brought the money into Pharaoh’s house" (v. 14); again, if the land comes under Joseph’s sway, we read he "bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh" (v. 20). So, too of the people Joseph can say, "I have bought you this day and your land

for Pharaoh." Thus Joseph uses his supreme power, not for his own advancement, but for the glory of Pharaoh. THE SATISFACTION OF THE PEOPLE

Finally, a third striking fact remains to be noticed. If on the one hand Joseph's power is used to subdue all for Pharaoh, on the other hand his universal supremacy is used for the blessing of the people. If Pharaoh's glory is maintained the people's blessing is secured, but only as they unreservedly submit to Joseph. THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST In all this Joseph is a striking type of Christ in exaltation. If we are to be saved from the present power of evil, nothing can be of greater importance than to realize that Christ is in the place of supreme power, and to submit to Him. There are great powers in heaven — angels, principalities and powers; there are great powers in the world — kings and all that are in authority; there are great powers in the lower world — the devil and his angels; but the Lord Jesus is set in a place of absolute supremacy over every power. He Is set "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world but also in that which is to come." But if the Father has glorified the Son, it is that the Son may glorify the Father, as the Lord can say in His great prayer, "Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son that Thy Son may glorify Thee" (John 17:1). Moreover if the Father is glorified, His people are blessed. So we read, "As Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him." The glory which the Father has given to the Son is used for the glory of the Father and the blessing of His people. THE DAY OF POWER Nor will it be otherwise in the day to come, when Christ will put forth His subduing power, as King of kings and Lord of lords for the glory of God and the blessing of men under His Millennial reign. And so finally "He must reign till He hath put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that shall be annulled is death." "And when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all." This will introduce the new heavens and the new earth, where God will dwell and men be blessed.

Whether we think of the present day of grace, the Millennium for which earth waits, or the new heavens and the new earth that stretch far into eternity, all depends upon the supreme glory and power of the One who was once rejected of man. THE CENTRE OF PRAISE And the One who has secured all for the glory of God and the blessing of man will be the centre of heaven's praise. As in the days of old, those who had been blessed by Joseph come to Joseph saying, "Thou hast saved our lives" (Genesis 47:25). They recognize that they owe everything to Joseph. So, too, the great throng of the redeemed delight to say, "Thou art worthy . . . for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation." THE BLESSING OF SAINTS But not only were people saved by Joseph, but they prospered under Joseph. This we see set forth in the history of Israel and his sons. The Lord Jesus does a great deal more for His people than save them from the world's famine. He brings us into a good land, a heavenly country, and blesses us with spiritual blessings and as we enter into those spiritual blessings we shall grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Trembling, we had hoped for mercy —

Some lone place within the door; But the crown, the throne, the mansion, All were ready long before. And in past and distant ages, In those courts so bright and fair, Ere we were, was He rejoicing, All He won with us to share.

Mrs. Bevan 10 The Vision of Faith Genesis 50:15-26 The last two scenes in the history of Joseph present a striking contrast between the unbelief of the brethren and the dying faith of Joseph. If the first scene, described in verses 15 to 21, presents a sorrowful picture of unbelief of the brethren, it also brings into display the perfect grace of Joseph. A crisis in the history of the brethren makes manifest that they had no true knowledge of the heart of Joseph and therefore no real confidence in him. THE PAST REVIEWED

Joseph had saved their lives with a great deliverance (Genesis 45:7); he had put them in possession of "the best of the land" of Egypt, and he had nourished them with bread (Genesis 47:12). For seventeen years their had been the recipients of Joseph's bounty, and the special objects of his loving care, and yet — when a crisis arises — it becomes manifest that they have no personal knowledge of Joseph. They know something of his greatness and glory; they know the great work he has accomplished, they know that every blessing they enjoy is owing to his position and work, but they had no personal acquaintance with his mind and heart. It is as if they said, "WE know what he has done for us, but we do not know how he feels about us." And not knowing his mind, when the crisis arises it becomes manifest that they have no confidence in him, with the result that they conclude that he will think and act towards them according to the way they had thought and acted towards him. THE HEART REVEALED

They remember that when Joseph was but a lad of seventeen "they hated him and could not speak peaceably unto him," and now they conclude, "Joseph will peradventure hate us." Conscience recalls how wickedly they had acted in regard to Joseph, and now they say, "[He] will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him." They judge of his thoughts by their thoughts, of his heart by their hearts, and of his acts by their acts. THE CONDITION REALIZED

Alas! are not we Christians today oftentimes like Joseph's brethren of old? We know something of the glory of the Person of Christ, we know something of the efficacy of His work, we enjoy the benefits that flow from His finished work on the cross and His present service in the glory, but when some little crisis arises in our history it becomes manifest how little we know of His heart, and therefore what little confidence we have in Himself. We lack that personal intimate acquaintance with Christ, by which alone His mind is learned in such fashion that we can say not only "I know what He has done for me," but "I know how He feels about me." The result is that in the presence of some special trial we are, like Joseph's brethren, greatly distressed in soul. One has truly said, "Nothing has contributed more to the present distraction of saints than the lack of personal intercourse with the Lord. There has been a great and increased zeal to acquire knowledge of the Scriptures, but personal acquaintance with the Lord has not been correspondingly sought after." THE KNOWLEDGE OF SCRIPTURE The brethren of Joseph had heard the gracious words of Joseph when alone with him, but, not knowing his heart, they had little entered into the full, deep meaning of his words. So with ourselves it is possible to have great knowledge of the words of Scripture and yet be ignorant of the great truths the words convey. A true understanding can only be obtained by the knowledge of Christ. Hence the apostle prays "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ the Father of glory, may give unto us the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him." The knowledge of the schools — the knowledge of Greek and Hebrew — however useful in its place, will never give us the spirit of wisdom and revelation. Such knowledge may give In understanding of the letter of revelation, but not the spirit of revelation. We must know the mind of Christ to understand the words of Christ. THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST

Scripture speaks of external knowledge which a person may acquire by hearsay or sight, and also of conscious knowledge - that personal acquaintance by which we can know a person’s mind. It is of this latter knowledge Paul speaks, when he says, "That I may know Him," and it is this knowledge we so often lack. We know and rejoice in the glorious things He has done, but do we know the heart of the One who has done so much for us, in such fashion that we can say, ’’I know how He feels about me"? THE LACK OF CONFIDENCE The lack of true knowledge of Joseph’s heart, and the consequent lack of confidence in Joseph is revealed in the message that his brethren sent to him. And worse, they attempt to hide their own unbelief and mistrust of Joseph, by pretending they are only carrying out the dying commands of Joseph’s father. It is impossible to believe that Jacob left any such command. In total forgetfulness of Joseph’s forgiveness of all their sad past they now pray to be forgiven. In spite of all the manifested grace and love of Joseph their uneasy conscience leads them to harbour the thought that Joseph still has something against them. And even so, if not living in nearness to Christ — if we have not made acquaintance with His heart — we may, through sin, failure, and a careless walk, still think, when conscience begins to work, that Christ is against us for something we have done, and, like Joseph’s brethren, ask for forgiveness. And yet however great the failure of a true believer, Scripture never suggests that he should plead for forgiveness as if that question were not fully and eternally settled, but rather he is exhorted to confess his sin that communion may be restored. THE BRETHREN REASSURED This lack of confidence, after all the love that had been lavished upon them, broke the heart of Joseph. He "wept when they spake unto him" (v. 17). The saddest thing in all this sad world is unrequited love. But though his tears showed how deeply he felt he utters no word of reproach. The very tears would surely be sufficient to wither up their unbelief. But Joseph leads them into personal acquaintance with himself by letting them know there is nothing but love in his heart towards them, though he fully knows the evil of their hearts towards him. THE FEAR REMOVED

"As for you," he can say, "ye thought evil against me," but he can add, "Fear ye not." He says as it were, "I know all the evil of your hearts toward me, but there is nothing to fear, for there is nothing but love in my heart toward you." And thus once again he removes all fear as to the past and all anxiety as to the future, for he adds, "I will nourish you and your little ones. Thus It was "he comforted them and spake to their hearts" (margin). Perfect love casts out all fear. THE CONFIDENCE RESTORED

What a difference this interview must have made to these brethren. After this did any one seek to cast a doubt upon Joseph’s love they would surely say, "We have been in his presence, we have made personal acquaintance with himself, we know his mind. We not only know what he has done for us, but we know how he feels towards us. THE FAITH RISING In the final scene between Joseph and his brethren, the faith of Joseph rises above all the glories of this passing world and looks on to a better and brighter world that is yet to come. He thinks and speaks no more of the things that he had suffered, the power he had wielded, or the good he may have done. He forgets the things that are behind and reaches out to the things that are before. THE THINGS TO COME

Isaac, in his day, when he "was old and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see," looked on with faith’s clear vision to another world and spake "concerning things to come." Jacob at a later day, when dying, with like faith catches a glimpse of the glories on before, and worships, leaning upon the top of his staff. And now Joseph, about to take the passage through the valley, catches sight of the hills that are beyond, and rising above all passing things, lays hold by faith of the world

to come. THE END REACHED And God is not slow to mark His approval of the faith of these dying saints, shining in its greatest strength in the moment of nature's greatest weakness. It is not the great deeds they may have wrought in the course of their active lives, but the faith, shining amid the feebleness of age and the weakness of their lying moments, that has secured them a place in God's list of worthies of other days. The faith of other saints may shine in overcoming the difficulties of the way, in escaping the snares of the enemy, and triumphing over the temptations of the world, but the faith of these three saints is distinguished in that it forgets all seen and passing things, be they good or bad, great or small, and looks on to another world. And this is the more striking in the case of Joseph, seeing he had filled a place of such vast importance before the world in his day and generation. He realizes that all the glory of Egypt ends at last in a coffin in Egypt. He lad worthily filled a place of great power and glory in this world, such as no man before or since has ever had, but the end of all Egypt's glory is reached in these significant words, "He was put in a coffin in Egypt." THE LIVING GOD

Thus it is he speaks no more of man, and man's mall world, but of God — the living God, of the faithfulness of God, of the power of God, and the land of God. "I die," says Joseph. The life of the man who lad saved other lives by a great deliverance (Genesis 15:7) is fast slipping away, but if Joseph dies, God lives; if Joseph departs, God remains. And into the lands of the living and unchanging God he commends his brethren. Though he may be taken from them, yet he can say with the utmost assurance of faith, "God will surely visit you." The living God is their unfailing resource in the presence of the dying Joseph. THE CLEAR VISION

Furthermore, God will act in mighty power on behalf of His people, for, says Joseph, He will "bring you out of this land." Joseph had been long in Egypt; he saw Ephraim's children of the third generation (v. 23). They were thoroughly established in the land of Egypt. To nature nothing looked more unlikely than that a time would ever come when they would leave the land of Egypt for a land they had never seen, but faith, rising above things seen, and refusing to reason according to the mind of nature, sees with clear vision that, though the people of God may sojourn for a time in the land of Egypt, yet it is not the land of rest that God has promised for His people. Strangership in the land of Egypt may form part of God's ways with His people, but it has no place in God's purpose for His people. THE FAITHFUL GOD

Thus the faith of Joseph passes on to the land of promise. As surely as God will visit His people in grace to bring them out of Egypt, so surely He will stretch out His hand in mighty delivering power to bring them into the land of His purpose — "a good land and a large . . . a land flowing with milk and honey." Moreover this good land, with all its blessing and glory, which is unrolled before the faith of the dying Joseph, is secured by the unconditional promise of God, made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Joseph is dying, but no shadows darken the hour of his passing, for he sees in faith that all blessing to a far future rests upon the faithfulness and power of the living God. A DEATH REMEMBERED So it comes to pass in the power of faith's vision of the living God he gives directions concerning his bones. They are not to be left in Egypt. What a witness to the Israelites must the coffin of Joseph have been through the long centuries, forever reminding them that not even death itself can hinder the living God from fulfilling all His pleasure, and carrying out His purpose for His people. So in accord with the oath made to Joseph, when at last they leave the land of Egypt, "Moses took the bones of Joseph with him" (Exodus 13:19), still to be a witness to faith in God, throughout the forty years of wilderness journeyings. And when at last they reach the

land of promise, his body is buried in the "parcel of ground which Jacob bought of the sons of Hamor" (Joshua 24:32), there to sleep in the dust of the earth until he awakes to everlasting life and stands in his lot at the end of days. THE SAVIOUR RISEN Nor is it otherwise with the people of God today. Faith still looks beyond the valley of the shadow of death, to the home of God’s eternal purpose. In the presence of death faith, as of old, still rests on the God of resurrection, but with yet clearer vision, for we see Christ risen from among the dead, seated at God’s right hand of power, holding in His hand the keys of death and the grave. As our faith looks up to the risen Man in the glory, may the passing glories of this dying world become small in our esteem so that, forgetting the things that are behind, we reach out to the things that are before, while waiting for the moment when the Lord will surely visit His people — when He "Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

Thus while to sight all may seem to end in a coffin in Egypt, faith has in view that glorious moment when we shall be caught up together to be forever with the Lord. "Wherefore comfort one another with these words." THE END

S. Life and Godliness.

Life and Godliness.

Hamilton Smith.

(Extracted from Scripture Truth Vol. 40, 1959-61, pages 51-5.) In the Second Epistle of Peter the Spirit of God addresses believers, who, with the Apostle, are marked by "like precious faith." The Apostle warns us against "false teachers," that will be found in the Christian circle; for he says, "among you;" and he foretells the corruption, that will mark Christendom "in the last days" (2 Peter 2:1; 2 Peter 3:3).

Let us remember that the Apostle is not describing heathendom, but the condition of Christendom, in which our lot is cast, and as it exists in our times; for who can doubt that we live in "the last days"? — the awful condition of which is so vividly portrayed. The terrible nature of this corruption is brought home to us by the illustrations and figures used to set it forth. We are carried far back to "the angels that sinned" to find a parallel to the rebellion against God of Christendom. The world of the ungodly before the flood, is used to illustrate the violence and corruption in Christendom. The wicked lives and "filthy conversation" of the men of Sodom and Gomorrah are used to set forth the moral degradation that exists in Christendom. The history of Balaam is referred to as setting forth the "covetous practices" that prevail in these last days. To find figures, that adequately set forth the return of Christendom to the conditions of heathendom, the Apostle uses the figure of a dog returning to its vomit, and the washed sow to her wallowing in the mire. But there is another side to this solemn picture. The Apostle not only warns us of the evil but, for our comfort and encouragement, he shows that in the darkest moment of the last days it is still possible for the individual believer to escape the corruptions around and live a life of godliness. Moreover, he encourages us to live this life by setting before us the promises of coming glory, to which the path of godliness will lead. So that we may say, the two great themes of this second epistle are; first, setting before us the life of godliness, by which the believer passes on to glory; second, warning us against the awful corruptions of Christendom, which are leading on to judgment. A brief consideration of the way these things are presented in the epistle will make this clear. In 2 Peter 1:1-21, the Apostle first sets before us the life of godliness and the glory of the kingdom to which it leads. In 2 Peter 2:1-22 and 2 Peter 3:1-18, down to verse 10, he brings before us the different forms of corruption and the judgment to which they lead. Also, in chapter 3, we are warned not to be carried away by scoffers, who, taking advantage of the longsuffering grace of God, pursue their lusts and deny that any judgment is coming. Finally, having been thus warned, we are again exhorted to live the life of godliness and to grow in it. In his Second Epistle to Timothy, the Apostle Paul wrote in the same strain. He warns us that "in the last days" Christendom would have "a form of godliness" but "denying the power thereof." If he presses upon us the path of separation, he also warns us that, having taken that path, we are to "flee youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, love, peace."

Some centuries ago, Protestantism judged the gross evils of Romanism and separated from them. Again, Noncomformity may deplore certain evils in Protestant nationalism, and separate from them. The Brethren, so-called, may rightly condemn evils found in Romanism, Protestantism and Noncomformity, and take a path separate from them; but let us remember that neither Protestants, Noncomformists, nor Brethren will escape the governmental judgment of God simply because they have separated from what is evil, because contrary to truth. Unless the inner life of godliness, consistent with the outward path of separation, is maintained, all outward position, however correct, will be of no avail.

If then we desire to escape the corruptions of Christendom, and live the life of godliness, we shall do well to consider the rich provision that God has made to enable the individual believer to live this life in the midst of the appalling evils of the last days.

Firstly, let us note that the solid basis for the life of godliness has been laid in the cross of Christ. To this reference is made when the Apostle speaks of "the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." At the cross the rights of God were maintained by our Saviour giving Himself a propitiation for "the whole world" (1 John 2:2). God has thus been so satisfied and glorified, that now in perfect righteousness He can proclaim forgiveness of sins to all, and pronounce the one who believes "justified from all things." So we may say that at the cross the righteousness of God is satisfied, the love of God is gratified; God Himself is glorified; the believer in Christ is justified.

Secondly, we learn that not only are we as believers saved, but that God by "His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness." We have to face the power of the flesh within, the power of the world around, and the power of the devil against us; but the power of God, which is far above every adverse power, is for us, and in this power it is possible to live the life of godliness.

Thirdly, to encourage us to live the litre of godliness, we are told that connected with it are "exceeding great and precious promises." In the course of the epistle we learn that these promises connect us with the "everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" and the "new heavens and a new earth."

Fourthly. There are unrolled before us the beautiful moral qualities that mark the life of godliness. The Apostle speaks of faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, endurance, godliness, brotherly love, and love. We are exhorted to have these qualities together, each one effecting the other, so that in result there may be an even, balanced life of godliness.

Faith naturally comes first, for it is by "the door of faith" (Acts 14:27), that we enter into blessing; and in our practical lives as believers, "without faith it is impossible to please" God (Hebrews 11:6).

Virtue sets forth moral excellence, and is to be resident in our faith. In 1 Peter 2:9, we learn that we are chosen to "show forth the praises [excellences, New Trans.] of Him," who has called us. This is the same word in the original as here translated, "virtue." The reality of the faith is proved by a change of life that exhibits some of the moral excellences, seen in perfection in Christ.

Knowledge is needed to set forth these excellences, therefore it must be present in virtue. However true and sincere the heart may be, if there be ignorance as to the commands of the Lord, there will be failure in obedience. As one has said, "A true heart is of vital importance; but an

instructed mind as to what the will of God is, is needed to regulate and guide the warmest heart." . Martha's service for the Lord exhibited many excellent qualities, but it was not tempered by the knowledge of His mind — the knowledge that Mary obtained by sitting at the feet of Jesus and hearing His word. We may well pray with the Apostle Paul to be "filled with the knowledge of His will" (Colossians 1:9); and again, that our "love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment," in order that we may "approve things that are excellent" (Php 1:9-10).

Temperance is needed in our knowledge. In Galatians 5:23, this word is rendered "self-control" in the New Translation. The possession of knowledge apart from self-control may lead, as with the Corinthian saints, to our being puffed up with a sense of self-importance. We are warned in 1 Corinthians 8:2, that if a man uses knowledge to exalt himself, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. How important then to judge ourselves, so that with our knowledge there may be temperate thoughts of self; not thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, "but to think soberly" (Romans 12:3).

Endurance is the word used in the New Translation for "patience," and this we need together with sober thoughts of self. If by grace we have a sober estimate of ourselves we may be in danger of being impatient with a self-assertive person, who may " think himself to be something when he is nothing" (Galatians 6:3). All such pretensions we have to endure, considering ourselves lest we be tempted.

Godliness, or the fear of God, is to be found in our endurance. Otherwise there is the danger of making endurance with the weaknesses and failures of one another an excuse for passing over actual evil in ourselves or others.

Brotherly love must be there, so that, while ever seeking to give God His place, we may not forget what is due to our brother. With godliness we are to remember to show brotherly love.

Love comes last, for we are to beware lest our love to a brother may degenerate into mere partiality or natural friendship. It is to be love after the Divine pattern. Commencing with faith, we come at last to Divine love, and thus partake of the "divine nature," of which the Apostle speaks in verse 4. These then are the beautiful qualities that make up the life of godliness.

Fifthly. Having brought before us the life of godliness, the Apostle, in the verses that follow, encourages us to live the life by setting before us its blessedness and warning us of its neglect. We are told that if "these things" be in us and abound, our lives will not be unfruitful. Where these beautiful, Christ-like qualities are found there will be fruit for God. The Father will be glorified, and we shall be manifested as the disciples of Christ, as John 15:8 tells us. Then we are warned that the lack of "these things" will result in spiritual blindness, that cannot look afar off to the glory to which godliness leads, nor look back to the cross, where all ungodliness was judged.

Sixthly. We are encouraged to "do these things," and thus be preserved in the present from falls, and in the future have an "abundant entrance" into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour. Every believer will be in the kingdom, but only those who live the life of godliness will have an abundant entrance. The Apostle is not speaking of preaching or teaching or the exercise of gifts, which are not given to all, and which may give prominence before others. He is speaking of the secret life of godliness, which is open to all. We all have to beware lest we estimate ourselves falsely through any little service we render. Those specially, who are gifted, and much

before the public eye, have to beware lest amidst constant engagements, constant preaching, and public work before men, they neglect the secret life of godliness before God. Does not Scripture warn us that it is possible to preach with all the eloquence of men and angels, and yet be nothing? That which bears fruit for God, and will have its bright reward in the day to come is the life of godliness, from which all true service must flow, and without which no amount of religious activity will carry blessing for the soul, even if, in the over-ruling ways of God, it may be used for the blessing of others, as indicated in Php 1:15-18.

Seventhly. To encourage us to live the life of godliness the Apostle sets before us the glory of the kingdom to which it leads. He with two other disciples had been eyewitnesses of this glory on the "holy mount." There they saw the power and coming of the Lord Jesus, which will introduce the kingdom. There too they saw the "majesty" of Christ, that will be displayed in the kingdom, when the One, who had received dishonour and shame at the hands of men, "received from God the Father honour and glory." Further, they realized that believers will be "with Him" in the day of His glory. In the closing chapter, the Apostle, still having in view the manner of persons we ought to be, marked by holy conversation and godliness, carries us in spirit beyond the kingdom, where righteousness reigns, into the "new heavens and a new earth," where righteousness dwells. To sum up the truth as to godliness, so blessedly brought before us in this portion of the word of God; we learn, 1. The basis the life of godliness in the Cross (2 Peter 1:1).

2. The Divine power, that enables us to live this life (2 Peter 1:3).

3. The precious promises attached to this life (2 Peter 1:4).

4. The moral qualities that form the life (2 Peter 1:5-7).

5. The present fruit for God that flows from this life (2 Peter 1:8).

6. The abundant entrance into the kingdom that the life secures (2 Peter 1:11).

7. The glory of the kingdom and the eternal state, to which it leads (2 Peter 1:11-21; 2 Peter 3:11-14). As these things pass before our souls, we are made to realize the truth of the words of the Apostle Paul: — "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come" (1 Timothy 4:8).

S. Modernism.

Modernism.

Hamilton Smith.

Extracted from Scripture Truth magazine, Volume 13, 1921, pages 278.

All true Christians have been shocked by the recent rationalistic utterances of different public men holding high official positions in the religious world.

Alas! there is nothing new in attacks upon the Word of God and the Person of Christ. Such were made in the early days of Christianity and have continued, in different forms, throughout the era. During the past century many such attacks were made in a subtle, veiled, and more or less refined form, as in the case of the famous (or infamous) "Essays and Reviews." To-day, however, what is somewhat new is the open boldness, and coarse effrontery, with which so-called ministers of religion have become leaders in propagating the obscenities of spiritualism, in rearing the red flag of revolution, in the introduction of every form of worldliness, and above all in assailing revelation, and attacking the Person and work of Christ. In order that the Christian should be preserved from underrating this great evil on the one hand, or from being overcome by it on the other, it is of the first importance to view it in the very full light afforded by Scripture. In the light of Scripture the appearance of evil teachers, amongst the professing people of God, cannot occasion any surprise. It is foretold in numerous Scriptures in the New Testament which plainly warn us that, in the last days of the Christian era, difficult times would come in which men would arise having "a form of godliness" but denying "the power thereof" (2 Timothy 3:1-5); and that there will be false teachers "who privily shall bring in damnable heresies even denying the Lord that bought them" (2 Peter 2:1).

Moreover we must not look for any improvement, for we are expressly warned by Scripture that "evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived" (2 Timothy 3:13).

Again, we must be prepared for these evil doctrines becoming increasingly popular with the great mass of lifeless professors, for we read, "The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth and shall be turned unto fables " (2 Timothy 4:3). On the other hand, the light of Scripture will prevent us from overrating the evil effects of false teachers. They will never be able to pluck one of Christ’s sheep out of His hand. For has not the Lord said of His sheep, "They shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand."

Scripture also exposes the true character of these false teachers and makes abundantly clear their utter incompetence to understand, or expound things which can only be known by the Holy Spirit. A man may have had the best university and theological training, he may possess the very highest

intellectual abilities, he may be a Doctor of Divinity, a theological professor, and fill the highest position in the ecclesiastical world, but all these things, so highly esteemed by men, will not in themselves give him any capacity to comprehend, or competency to expound, the truths of God. Before giving heed to one who professes to instruct us in Divine things, Scripture warrants us in requiring some evidence that such an one has discovered himself to be a sinner in the sight of God, and, through faith in a living and personal Saviour, has received the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Ghost. If he knows nothing of "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ," he is simply a natural man not having the Spirit. Is there anything, we may well ask, in the utterances of these modernist teachers that would give any real hope that they are truly converted men? In a day of ruin and confusion we gladly fall back upon the Scripture that tells us, "The Lord knoweth them that are His." On the other hand we are also told, "By their fruits ye shall know them," so that we have no right to reckon amongst the children of God those whose utterances deny the vital truths of Christianity.

Here then, we fear, is the simple explanation of these foolish and evil statements in regard to the Bible and the Christ of God. They are the statements of men who we can only regard as unregenerate — natural men, not having the Spirit. And without the Spirit, Scripture definitely states there is no capacity to understand the things of God, "For what man knoweth the things of a man save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 2:11). And not only is he unable to enter into Divine things, but they are actually foolishness to him, as we read, "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14). Thus, for example, in the eyes of Canon Barnes and others, the story of Creation as unfolded in the book of Genesis is just a foolish myth, the product of an unenlightened age. So, too, Dean Inge, a man of great natural ability, is, in things Divine, so utterly dense that he tells us he cannot see that the story of Jonah has anything more to do with the "Christian religion"* than the story of Jack and the Bean Stalk.

{*We might of course inquire, What does the learned Dean mean by "the Christian Religion?" Does he mean Christianity according to the Revelation of God or Christianity according to the conception of man? We can only suppose the latter, seeing that the Dean appears to set such little store by the Revelation of God. In this case we should be inclined to agree with the Dean that the story of Jonah, as indeed much else that is in the Bible, has little or nothing to do with it. So much the worse for modern Christian religion. No one, however, who believes in an infallible revelation from God, and in the absolute authority of the Lord Jesus, will fail to recognize that the Lord Himself has for ever linked the story of Jonah with the most vital truths of the Christianity of the Bible (Matthew 12:39-40).}

Truly the natural eye can be trained to see marvellous things in the realm of nature, the ear can enjoy entrancing sounds, and the heart of man be moved by the deepest human emotions, but even so, there is a whole world of blessing and glory which lies entirely outside the range of the finest natural intellect. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." But, to the people of God these things have been revealed by the Spirit of God. This, however, is a closed world to the natural man, for unless born of the Spirit, no man can even see the things that belong to the Kingdom of God, much less enter that fair kingdom (Matthew 18:3 and John 3:3). For the men, who in the

presence of the light of the Gospel are content to remain in an unregenerate state, the Christian can only have pity; for their profane and infidel utterances nothing but unmingled contempt.

There is, however, another phase of this modernist movement which is characteristic of the last days. The natural man has never been truly subject to a revelation from God; at the same time, for many generations, professing Christians have been outwardly controlled by a more or less orthodox traditional religion. To-day, however, we are witnessing a great change. Men are casting aside the trammels of tradition. We are thus faced with a great mass of people who, while retaining a profession of Christianity, are no longer governed by the revelation of God, or the tradition of man. The result being that the natural heart of fallen man is expressing its enmity and opposition to God and to Christ without any restraint. This means in fact that Christendom is heading for apostasy. The dull-grey condition of orthodox tradition is passing, and men are declaring themselves as either black or white, a sure sign that we are nearing the end.

This, however, implies that there is also a distinct movement among the people of God, evidences of which are increasing on every side. It is written, "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him" (Isaiah 59:19). Are there not signs of a movement of the Spirit whereby the people of God are purging themselves from the vessels to dishonour; definitely asserting that "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God;" contending "for the faith which was once delivered to the saints;" announcing the Gospel in season and out of season; and looking for the coming of the Lord. The Lord is separating the precious from the vile, thus forming two distinct companies: one the lifeless profession, indifferent to Christ and tolerant of every evil, passing on to apostasy, to be spued out of Christ’s mouth as utterly nauseous to Him; the other a company of blood-bought people, that keep His Word and will not deny His Name, passing on to that long-looked-for moment when at the shout of the Lord they will be caught up "together" to be for ever with the Lord.

If these things are so, it behoves every true believer to declare plainly to which company he belongs. When Christ is assailed and the Word of God attacked, no true-hearted Christian can remain neutral. The word is very plain — "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord," and again, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

S. One Shepherd and One Flock.

One Shepherd and One Flock.

Hamilton Smith. In John 10:1-42 we have the privilege to see every Person in the Godhead engaged to carry out the divine counsels concerning Christ and His sheep: (a) the Father sending the Son (36), giving the sheep to Christ, and caring for them as they are held in His hand (29); (b) the Son calling the sheep by name leading them out of man's world, going before them, giving His life for them, and forming them into one flock; (c) the Holy Spirit (under the figure of the porter) opening the door for Christ so that His voice is heard and the sheep drawn to Christ. Moreover, no power of the devil, no opposition of man, nor failure of the disciples could prevent the counsels of God being carried out. Nor is it otherwise today! It is good indeed for our souls to realise that in spite of the turmoil in the world, the corruptions of Christendom, the opposition of religious leaders, and the failure of the true people of God, Christ's sheep are being reached, blessed, led through the wilderness and brought home to glory. The chapter opens with an allegory (v. 1) in which the Lord uses the familiar customs of an Eastern country in relation to a shepherd and his sheep, to set forth His own gracious work in the midst of Israel. The nation is likened to a sheepfold. False prophets and pretended Messiahs had risen from time to time seeking to obtain influence over the sheep for their own profit and exaltation. Such were only thieves and robbers. They did not enter in by God's appointed way — the door (v. 2). But at last One came into the Jewish fold by the way that God had foretold. In Him the varied prophecies as to the coming of the Messiah were fulfilled. He was born of the virgin, according to Isaiah; and at Bethlehem according to Micah. Thus Christ entered by the door and was manifested to be the true Shepherd of Israel, the "One Shepherd" foretold by Ezekiel (Ezekiel 34:23).

"To Him the porter openeth" (v. 3). The porter is a figure of the power of God, whether acting providentially in ordering circumstances, or by the Spirit working in the hearts of men. Thus the way was opened for Christ to reach "His own sheep." However, while the Lord presents Himself as the Shepherd of the sheep, it is not as in Ezekiel 34:1-31 to deliver Israel from their enemies and establish them in their land. For that the time has not yet come. Israel has rejected Christ, and the nation is left in its blindness. Thus, the Lord is presented as the Shepherd calling His own sheep and leading them out of the Jewish fold into all the blessings of the new Christian flock. Of the mass of the Jewish nation, by whom He is rejected, He has to say, "Ye are not of my sheep." (26). Here, then, the Lord is seen in the midst of the corrupt Jewish nation exclusively occupied with His sheep, while they recognise no voice but His. Then we learn the three great activities of the Lord on behalf of His sheep. (1) The Shepherd calls His own sheep by name, and they hear His voice. Hearing His voice implies that they not only heard the words of the Lord, but, that His words conveyed a personal message that reached their hearts. Preaching at Antioch, Paul can say to the Jews that their rulers "Knew Him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath day." (Acts 13:27). Thus though they heard the prophetic Scriptures, these Scriptures conveyed no message to the hearers. They did not hear the voice of the prophets. The sheep "hear His voice," He has personal dealings with them. "He calleth His own sheep by name." As we

trace the Lord’s path, recorded in this Gospel, we hear Him calling His sheep one by one. Simple fishermen, like Andrew, Simon, and Philip, are called. Nathanael, an Israelite in whom is no guile; Nicodemus, a Pharisee and a ruler; a fallen woman by a well side; a nobleman of Cana; a helpless man at Bethesda, and a blind beggar by the wayside are called. They came from very different grades of society, but one thing marked them all, they "heard His voice." (2) Having called them, the Shepherd does not leave them in the Jewish fold, that had rejected Christ. "He leadeth them out" of the Jewish nation that was passing on to judgment.

(3) Having put the sheep out, the Shepherd does not leave them when they are outside, for we read "He goeth before" to lead them in the path of life and blessing (v. 4). On their side, the sheep "hear His voice," "follow Him," and "flee" from the stranger that would seek to draw them from the Shepherd. They flee, not because they know but because they know not the voice of strangers (v. 5). "It is not the sheep’s knowledge of the stranger but of the voice of the Good Shepherd that keeps it from the snares which he tries to set for it. They know what they hear is not that voice. It is thus the simple are kept; the wise wish to know everything, and are deceived." (J.N.D.). We are to be "wise unto that which is good and simple concerning evil" (Romans 16:19). Thus we have a striking picture of a flock of sheep wholly dependent upon the Shepherd. Sheep are foolish and feckless things, prone to wander, easily frightened and soon scattered. Left to themselves they would be in a hopeless plight. Under the guidance of the Shepherd, in spite of their weakness and folly, they will be safe. If they are hungry and faint, He is there to lead them into green pastures. Are they thirsty, He will lead them by still waters; have they to tread a rough bit of road, He is there to guide them in the way; does the wolf seek to attack the sheep, the Shepherd is there to protect. The Shepherd is there wholly devoted to the sheep, and the sheep are entirely dependent upon the Shepherd — "they know His voice," and flee from others. Such is the lovely picture of the Christian flock formed of believers, outside the Jewish camp, gathered to Christ.

Blinded by Jewish prejudices, the Lord’s hearers "understood not what things they were which He spake unto them" (v. 6). Alas! it is still true that Christendom (including many true believers) fails to understand the Lord’s allegory. Ignoring His teaching, Christendom has again formed folds after the Jewish order. Thus we find vast religious systems in which the sheep of Christ are linked up with unbelievers under the control of human heads, bound together by human ordinances. Thus, if Christendom has again formed itself into a religious camp, after the pattern of Judaism, the word still applies, "Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp" (Hebrews 13:13). Let us, however, remember that if we go forth from the camp, it is not simply to escape its evils, but to give Christ His place. We go forth "unto Him." Having left the camp we are not simply a company of believers left to our own devices, but under the guidance of Christ. Taking a place outside the religious organisations, it is still possible to walk in the light of these great truths and give Christ His place as the Shepherd of the sheep, and refusing every stranger voice, to look only to Christ as our great Leader — the One with all wisdom, love and power, to guide us through the wilderness and home to glory. In the verses that follow, the Lord applies His allegory (7, 8); unfolds the blessings into which He leads His sheep (9); warns us of the dangers to which we are exposed (10-13); presents Himself as the great resource of the sheep in the presence of every foe (14, 15); tells us of the other sheep drawn from the Gentiles, to form with the Jewish sheep one flock. (1) In applying the allegory, the Lord tells us that He is the door of the sheep. God had set up the Jewish fold, and though man had corrupted it the godly remnant had no direction to leave the fold until

Christ came. But Christ having come, and being rejected, the nation is left to pass on to judgment, and He is presented as the One sent of God to be a door of escape for the godly from the guilty nation. So after Christ was risen, Peter can present Christ as the One through whom believers could save themselves from this untoward generation (Acts 2:40).

(2) The Shepherd is not only the door by which the sheep can escape from the corrupt Jewish fold, but He is the door into the positive Christian blessings. If "any one" (Jew or Gentile) enter by personal faith in Christ, into the new circle of blessing of which Christ is the centre, he will find salvation: — i.e., salvation for his soul from sins and judgment, and then salvation from all the power of the enemy during the wilderness journey. Moreover, the sheep under the leading of the Shepherd will be brought into liberty, by which they can enter within the veil as worshippers, and go out to all the world with the glad tidings. Further, under the leadership of Christ the sheep are fed, — they find pasture.

(3) The Lord warns us against the opposition we shall meet as we pass through this world. He speaks of the "thief," the "hireling," and the "wolf." Already the Lord has told us that the thief does not enter by the door; he breaks into the house secretly, unawares, and to rob. Later we are warned by Jude against "certain men who crept in unawares" amongst the people of God (Jude 1:4); and Peter warns against false prophets who privily shall bring in destructive heresies (2 Peter 2:1). The hireling does not necessarily teach false doctrine, but he serves for wages. Peter warns us against shepherding the flock of God for "filthy lucre" (1 Peter 5:2) and that there will arise those who "through covetousness" will "make merchandise" of the saints (2 Peter 2:3). Christendom has largely fallen into the snare of the hireling. The hireling may profess to tend the sheep but his motive is self. Thus when danger arises, he thinks of his own safety and flees. The wolf comes to the flock in sheep’s clothing. He makes a fair profession by which the saints are deceived. So the Apostle Paul can warn us that after his departure wolves would enter in among the saints "not sparing the flock" (Matthew 7:15; Acts 20:29). The wolf cannot seize the sheep out of the hand of the Shepherd but he can seize and scatter the sheep. Alas! what havoc these have wrought in the Christian profession! It is only as we give Christ His place as the Shepherd of the sheep that we shall escape their depredations. In contrast to the thief, that robs, Christ came to give life, and to give it abundantly in all its fulness. In contrast to the hireling who thinks only of himself and flees in the presence of danger, "the Good Shepherd" giveth His life for the sheep." He is not only "the Shepherd of the sheep" separating them from the Jewish fold, but He is also "the good Shepherd" devoted to the sheep. We may fail in following Him but He will never fail in devotedness to the sheep. This devoted love is seen in the Lord giving His life to save the sheep from the thief and the wolf.

(4) We find in Christ our one resource in the presence of all we have to meet. We have the blessed assurance that the One loves us unto death, is the One who knows us through and through. As the Lord can say, "I am the good Shepherd and know my sheep." He had been the Object of the Father’s love as He passed through this world. In the same way the sheep are the objects of the Lord’s love and care as they pass through this wilderness. How good to realise that He knows the sheep: He knows our trials, our difficulties, our sorrows, our circumstances, our weaknesses — all is known to Him! Moreover the sheep in their little measure know the Shepherd and confide in Him, as He, in the perfection of His way, trusted in the Father.

(5) In laying down His life for the sheep the Lord opens the door for His sheep from among the Gentiles. His sheep are not only found in the Jewish fold: He has a vast number among the Gentiles. They, too, must be brought out of heathen darkness into the Christian flock; they, too, will hear His voice and will form, with the sheep from the Jewish fold, one flock under One Shepherd.

Thus we have the Lord presented as "the Shepherd of the sheep" separating His sheep from an earthly religion; as the "Good Shepherd" devoted in love to the sheep; and as the "One Shepherd" uniting the sheep into one flock. Like Himself, He would have His flock to be separate from the corrupt religious profession, devoted to Himself and united to one another. This, then, is the beautiful picture of Christianity presented by the Lord. Alas! in Christendom we see little that answers to the teaching of the Lord. But the truth remains. It is still possible to refuse all that is contrary to it and seek to walk in the light of the Lord’s teaching. This will only be possible as we have the Lord before us as "the Shepherd of the sheep," "the Good Shepherd," and the "One Shepherd." HAMILTON SMITH.

S. One Thing

"One Thing"

Hamilton Smith.

"One thing thou lackest" (Mark 10:21) "One thing is needful" (Luke 10:42) "One thing I do" (Php 3:13) The Scriptures in which these three statements occur, bring before us very different characters. In the first passage we learn that "one thing" was lacking in the rich young ruler. In the second, we learn in the story of Martha and Mary that the "one thing" lacking is the "one thing" needful. In the third Scripture, we find that the "one thing" needful, is the "one thing" that marked the Apostle Paul.

Seeing that our Lord lays such stress upon this "one thing," it surely behoves us to search our hearts, in the light of these Scriptures, with the earnest desire to be marked by this "one thing."

1 "One Thing Thou Lackest" (Mark 10:17-22) In the story of the rich young ruler two truths come prominently before us. First we learn that in many ways our lives may be excellent, and yet lack "one thing." Secondly, we discover that this "one thing" is single-hearted devotedness to Christ. Of all the different characters that came in contact with our Lord, in His earthly course, none, perhaps, presents a more sorrowful end than that of this rich young ruler. There was so much at the commencement of his story that gave promise to a bright future as a disciple of Christ; yet, in the end, we read he "went away grieved." As far as we have any record, in Scripture, he is never again found in the company of Christ and His own. Therefore, even if at heart a believer, he missed the blessing of the company of Christ in the midst of His people, and failed as a witness for Christ in the world. This young man was marked by many creature excellencies and much moral beauty. He was an earnest young man, for we read, he came "running" to the Lord. He was reverential for he "kneeled" in His presence. He had a desire after spiritual blessings, such as eternal life. His outward life was blameless, for he had observed the outward law from his youth. All these qualities, in their place, are beautiful and attractive, and the Lord was not unmindful of these creature excellencies, for we read, "Jesus, beholding him loved him." Yet, with all these excellencies, the Lord discerns there was "one thing" lacking. To make manifest the one thing lacking in his life the Lord applies three tests. As with the young man, so with ourselves, we may be living outwardly decent and blameless lives, and yet, our witness for Christ be marred by the lack of "one thing." It will be well therefore to prove ourselves by the three tests that the Lord sets before the ruler.

First, he was tested by his earthly possessions;

Secondly, he was tested by the cross;

Thirdly, he was tested by a Person — the rejected Christ.

There was something he was asked to give up; something to take up; and Someone to follow. The first test is earthly possessions. Taking them in the widest sense as all those things which would

be an advantage to us as living in the world, we may ask, "Have we weighed up all these things in the light of Christ, and counted them but loss for Christ?" Have we reckoned up the advantages that birth may confer; the ease and worldly pleasures that riches can secure; the position, the honour, and dignities that intellect, or genius, or accomplishments, may command? Then, without minimizing these things, have we looked full in the face of Jesus — the One that is altogether lovely — and, seeing that He is incomparably greater than all these things, have we, in the power of affection for Christ, deliberately made the choice that Christ shall be our great Object, and not these things? The second test is the cross. The Lord says to the young man, "take up the cross." Are we prepared to accept the place in relation to the world in which the cross has set us before God? The Apostle could say, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Galatians 6:14). The cross stands between us and our sins, the old man, and judgment: but have we also seen that it stands between us and the world? If we take up the cross, not only is the world condemned for us, but we shall be utterly refused by the world. The third test is a rejected Christ; for the Lord says to the young man, "follow Me." Are we prepared to identify ourselves with One who is hated and rejected by the world; One who was born in a stable and cradled in a manger; who, in His passage through this world, had not where to lay His head; who died an ignominious death upon a cross of shame, and was buried in a borrowed grave; One, who in resurrection was still found in company with a few poor fisher folk; One, who was, and still is, in the outside place of reproach? Are we prepared to go forth unto Him without the camp bearing His reproach?

Thus the tests in that day, as well as this, are, Can we give up earthly advantages, take a place outside the world, and follow Christ, the One who is in reproach? These tests come to us as they came to the young man, and the question for each one is, What answer shall we give?

We can answer these tests in one of two ways. First, like the young man of whom we read he "went away grieved," we may turn back to the things of earth. He did not turn away in anger or hatred of Christ. He had no fault to find with Christ; but the world was too strong for him. Like Demas, of a later day, he loved this present world. Secondly, we may give an answer like Peter and the disciples, of whom we learn they left all and followed Christ (v. 28). The one thing the young man lacked was single-hearted devotedness to Christ. So he "went away." The disciples with all their ignorance, their weakness and their many failures, were drawn to Christ in affection and so left all to follow Him.

How often, since that day, has the history of this young man been repeated. Is there anything sadder than to look back and remember how many young men made a good start, and seemed to promise well, but where are they today? In spite of excellencies such as earnestness, sincerity, and zeal, they turned back, if not to the gross world, to the corrupt religious world; and the reason is plain, they lacked the "one thing" — that single-hearted devotedness to Christ, that sets Christ before the soul as the first end supreme Object of the life. It may tee they put themselves before Christ, or the need of souls before Christ, or the good of saints before Christ, or service before Christ, with the result that, in the end, they turned back to the things of earth. There is not sufficient power in the love of souls, the love of saints, or the desire to serve, to keep our feet in the narrow path. Only Christ, Himself, can hold us in the outside place of reproach, following hard after Him.

2 "One Thing is Needful" (Luke 10:38-42)

Passing to the touching scene at Bethany, we find two devoted women, of whom one lacked the "one thing" needful, while the other chose "that good part."

Martha, like the rich young man of Mark 10:10, was characterized by much that was excellent. The house at Bethany, apparently, belonged to her, and she willingly opened her home to receive the Lord of glory. Then, not only was she hospitable, but she was a busy servant in the service of the Lord. There are "many things" to be done for the Lord in this world, and Martha was occupied with these "many things." Nevertheless, with all these excellencies she had overlooked "one thing" and she has to learn that the "one thing" she had overlooked, is the "one thing needful." In result, she was cumbered with service, irritated with her sister, and complaining before the Lord. How truly Martha represents that large class of Christians who, unconsciously to themselves, make their particular service their great object rather than the Lord Himself. Such would engage all others as helpers in their special service, and are irritated if left "to serve alone." Lacking the "one thing," they are careful and troubled about "many things."

How right and happy to put our homes and means at the disposal of the Lord, and to be occupied in His blessed service; and yet this scene warns us that it is possible for these activities to be first in our thoughts and affections, rather than the Lord Himself. If this is so, we lack the "one thing" needful — the single-hearted devotedness that puts Christ before all service. Of Mary we read, she chose the "good part," and that "good part" was part with Christ. For her Christ was the supreme Object before all else, whether possessions, or service, or her sister. Having Christ as her one Object she escaped the restlessness, the care and trouble that marked her zealous sister. While Martha was "cumbered about much serving," Mary was calmly sitting at the feet of Jesus. When Martha came to the Lord with her complaining word, Mary "sat at Jesus' feet, and heard His word."

We are not left to form our spiritual judgment as to the differences between these two sisters, for we are plainly told that the Lord reproved Martha and commended Mary. In making the Lord her Object, Mary had chosen the "good part" which will not be taken from her. Very soon we shall leave all earthly possessions; in yet a little, service and toil will be past, but for ever and ever Christ will be the Portion and Object of our souls. Mary chose the eternal portion in time; she made Him her one great Object, and chose above all else to sit in His company. Other things may be taken away, but this will not be taken away. For as she chose to be with Him in time, so will she be with Him for all eternity. Does then, this better choice — this "one thing needful" — mean that Mary neglected service for the Lord? Scripture not only rebukes such a thought, but clearly shows that she not only served the Lord, but her service was stamped with the Lord's approval in a way that is unique above all other service before or since. Here the Lord says, "Mary hath chosen that good part." In the fine scene of Matthew 26:1-75, the Lord says, "she hath wrought a good work upon Me." The one who chose the "good part," in due season does the "good work." So high is the Lord's approval of this good work, that He says, "Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her" (Matthew 26:10-13).

Let us then remember that the "good part" must precede the "good work." Only as Christ is our one Object will service, and all else, fall into its rightful place.

3 "One Thing I do" (Php 3:13)

Turning now to the third chapter of the Epistle to the Philippians we find in the Apostle one who, above all others, answered to the three tests that the Lord set before the rich young ruler. He gave up earthly possessions, he took up the cross, and he followed Christ.

First, what were the possessions that he gave up? Like the young ruler, Paul was marked by creature excellencies and worldly advantages in no small degree. He was well born, he was freeman of no mean city, he was highly educated, he was intensely zealous in his religion, and as touching the law he was blameless.

All these circumstances and qualities combined to give him a great place in this world. But there came a day when, like the rich young man, he came in touch with Christ. Then came the test. Could he give up all that was an advantage to him as a man in this world — all those things which made something of Paul — in order that he might make everything of Christ? Let us remember that neither the rich young ruler, nor the "young man . . . whose name was Saul," was asked to give up the things of shame. All realize that we cannot follow Christ and go on with the hidden things of shame. Such things we are glad enough to leave behind. The test was, and is, can worldly advantages, human zeal, and blameless character, natural birth, religious reputation, be left behind as an object so that henceforth, instead of self, Christ may become the one Object of the life?

Instead of turning away grieved from Christ and going back to his great possessions, like the rich ruler, Paul forgot "those things which are behind" and reached forth unto Christ. He saw the glory of Christ, and he saw Christ in the glory. The rich ruler came in contact with Christ, but apparently, in spite of all His wonderful miracles he only saw in Christ a good Man; he did not see the glory of Christ. This made the great difference between these two young men. Paul saw the glory of Christ with the immediate result that all the glory of this world — all those things which were gain to him as a man in the flesh — were counted loss for Christ. He did not belittle these natural advantages: on the contrary, he reckoned them up, and having done so he counted them loss when compared with the glory of Christ. His natural excellencies were eclipsed by the "excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus" his Lord.

Secondly, there was not only what he gave up, but what he took up. In all truth he took up the cross. His one desire, as he passed through this world, was to be "made conformable unto His death" — the death of Christ. If Christ had died to the world, then Paul would have done with the world. For Paul the cross not only ended himself as a man in the flesh, but it for ever closed to him this present evil world.

Thirdly, having given up all his natural advantages as the object of his life; having taken up the cross which closed the world, he followed Christ as the one Object of his life. He turned his back on all earthly religion; he went outside the camp unto Christ, bearing His reproach. Henceforth Christ was his one Object, for he can say:

"For me to live is Christ" (Php 1:21);

"That I may win Christ" (Php 3:8);

"Be found in Him" (Php 3:9); and "That I may know Him" (Php 3:10).

Here, then, was a man who could say in all truth, the one thing that the ruler lacked, the "one thing" that Martha had to learn is needful, is the "ONE THING I DO." Henceforth his life was a life of single-hearted devotedness to Christ. For him Christ was the one supreme Object — not sinners, not saints, not service — but Christ. No one was ever more zealous in preaching the gospel of the grace of God to sinners, no one ever cared for all the Churches like the Apostle, no one was more untiring in service; but above all, and before all, Christ was his one Object. He did not lack the "one thing" like the ruler: he was not distracted by "many things" like Martha. He had before him one thing — to follow Christ. Thus it was he forgot "those things which are behind" and reached forth unto "those things which are before."

Moreover he lets us know what these things are. He shows us very clearly that they all centre in Christ.

First, Christ in the glory (Php 2:9-10) Secondly, the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus (Php 3:14).

Thirdly, the coming of the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ (Php 3:20).

Fourthly, being "fashioned like unto His glorious body" (Php 3:21).

How good then to make Christ our one Object. If we make service our object we shall end in seeking to exalt ourselves. If we make sinners our object we shall in all probability be drawn back into the world. If we make saints our object, they will break our hearts. But if Christ is our first and supreme Object we shall, like the Apostle, fight a good fight, finish the course, and keep the Faith, for Christ alone can hold our feet in the narrow path, guide us through every difficulty, and sustain us in the presence of every opposition. May we then in our little measure, be able to say with the Apostle, "One thing I do . . . I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Php 3:13-14).

Morn, noon, and night, Thro’ days o’ercast and bright, My purpose still is one;

I have one end in view, Only one thing I do, Until my Object’s won.

Chapter 33

S. Open Brethren, Their Origin, Principles, and Practice

Open Brethren, Their Origin, Principles, and Practice.

Hamilton Smith, 1930.

Introduction. The writer of the following paper has no quarrel with those known as Open Brethren. Their Gospel zeal and Missionary labours are well known and matters for thankfulness. That they meet on principles that the writer believes to be unscriptural is a matter that he regrets and if anything put forward in the following paper leads some to a clearer apprehension of scriptural principles it will be to him a cause of thankfulness. At the same time he deprecates anything that might have the appearance of an attack upon a company of the people of God. If then by chance this paper falls into the hands of any Open Brethren let such be assured that the fact that the writer sharply differs from them as to Scriptural principles of gathering would not, in itself, have called forth the following paper.

One reason alone has led to this paper, namely, a few individuals have arisen amongst so-called Exclusive Brethren, who advocate and seek to put into practice independent principles akin to those of the Open Brethren.

Such have arisen from time to time in days past. but, feeling it was inconsistent to continue with those whose principles they could no longer accept, they quietly withdrew and ceased to trouble their brethren.

To-day new methods have been adopted. Those who advocate these independent principles seek, at all cost, to maintain their links with the so-called Exclusive Brethren. while seeking, by their principles and practices to break down the barriers and establish intercommunion with any Open, or other, meeting, which in their individual judgment is free from evil. and thus bring together the Lord’s people on, what they judge to be scriptural ground.

Very naturally this movement, on the part of a few individuals, has aroused protest from those who refuse the Open and independent principles as contrary to Scripture. In spite of protest, and notwithstanding individual and collective appeals, these individuals have persisted in their course without consideration for the consciences of their brethren, and in spite of the fact that, wherever this movement has manifested itself, confusion has followed, brethren have been distressed, and disintegration has taken place. In the course of the resulting exercises enquiries have been raised, by many of our younger brethren, as to wherein the principles and practices of the Open Brethren differ from those of the so-called Exclusive brethren. The following paper is an attempt to answer these enquiries. The questions we would seek to answer are, First, What was the origin of the Open Brethren system? Second, What are the principles and practices of the Open Brethren, and wherein do they differ from the principles which the so-called Exclusive brethren believe to be scriptural? At the outset of our enquiry let it be understood that it is no question of Exclusive versus Open Brethren. It would be a very poor thing to seek to belittle Open Brethren in the endeavour to exalt Exclusive Brethren. This would be party work of the worst kind. In a day when

all have so lamentably failed it ill becomes any to seek to belittle others or make much of themselves. Moreover it is not a question of enquiring who has failed in carrying out the principles of God. In the application of Divine principles all have failed. Nor is it a question of seeking to discern where there are devoted or gifted men. Such can be found in every orthodox sect of Christendom.

It is solely a question of the truth of God, and what are God's principles for the guidance of His people in these days of ruin? Are the principles of the Open Brethren according to Scripture or not? In facing these questions we desire to banish from our minds all extraneous details, and keep to the main issue. For this reason we deprecate, and shall therefore seek to avoid, recounting stories of things that have been said and done by individuals, which only create prejudice, and have little or no bearing on the issue. Above all we desire that these questions may be faced in a spirit free from all bitterness.

1. The Origin of the Open Brethren. Our first enquiry must be, What was the origin of the Open Brethren? In 1847 it came to light that a Mr. B. W. Newton of Plymouth was teaching doctrines concerning the Person of Christ of such heretical character that they undermined the foundations of our faith. When it became clear that Mr. Newton maintained his evil doctrines, in spite of all remonstrance, many who had been associated with him at Plymouth separated from him and the meeting he attended at Compton Street. A considerable number of persons, however, adhered to him, though, at the same time putting forth a declaration that they did not hold his false doctrine. The question then arose, could assemblies of the Lord's people in other places receive a person coming from those who met with Mr. Newton at Plymouth? In the light of 2 John 1:7-11 it was felt by brothers of spiritual judgment that those in association with Mr. Newton, even though they refused his doctrine, were, according to Scripture, "partakers of his evil deeds," and therefore could not be received until they had cleared themselves from their wrong associations. The evil character of the doctrines in question was clearly demonstrated, and the course of those who separated from Mr. Newton fully upheld, at a meeting attended by over one hundred brethren, held at Bath in May, 1848. Alas, in spite of the judgment of godly brethren, very shortly after the meeting at Bath, a company of believers meeting in Bethesda Chapel, Bristol, received seven persons coming from the meeting with Mr. Newton at Compton Street, Plymouth, and who were still in fellowship with the false teacher though it was stated they were free from his false teaching.* These persons were received in spite of protest from godly persons at Bethesda, and warnings from others at a distance. It was felt that they were deliberately receiving persons that Scripture speaks of as "partakers of evil deeds.'' It followed that the brethren at Bethesda who had protested in vain (between thirty and forty persons) withdrew from fellowship with those meeting at Bethesda.**

{* As a matter of fact, it appears that at least three of these persons upheld Mr. Newton's errors and circulated his tracts containing his false teaching, at Bethesda. See, " A Letter on the principles of gathering" by J. S. O., pages 1 and 2: and " The Doctrine of Christ and Bethesdaism " by W. Kelly, page 9.}

{** Authority for the above historical facts will be found in "The Whole Case of Plymouth and Bethesda," by W. Trotter. pages 24, 29-31; "A Letter on Bethesda Fellowship" (2nd Edition), by J. S. O., pages 10, 11; "Bethesda Fellowship,"1907, page 6; "What is the present position of

so-called Open Brethren?" by F. W. Grant.} The outcome of the action at Bethesda, Bristol, was a general division in which those who defended, and remained in fellowship with Bethesda, became known as "Open" Brethren; their 'open' principle meaning, a door open to receive those in association with a teacher holding false doctrine, so long as the person received had not himself imbibed the false doctrine. With this 'open' reception there developed amongst the Open Brethren the principle of 'independent' meetings.

Such, briefly, are the historical facts. We may now pursue our enquiry as to the two principles which more particularly characterize the Open Brethren, namely, their method of reception and their independency of meetings.

2. Open Reception.

Enquiry makes it very evident that the Open Brethren have adopted the principle that association with those holding evil doctrine does not defile unless the evil doctrine is imbibed, and therefore they are free to receive individuals, believed to be sound in the faith, without reference to their associations. The earliest evidence that this is their principle of reception is contained in what is known as "the letter of the Ten." This was a letter drawn up and signed by ten leaders of Bethesda, in July 1848, in which they sought to justify the course they had pursued. In this letter we find this principle clearly stated. They say, "Supposing the author of the tracts were fundamentally heretical, this would not warrant us in rejecting those who came from under his teaching, until we were satisfied that they had understood and imbibed views essentially subversive of foundation truth." Here they plainly assert that they were prepared to receive those still in association with a heretic. This principle, to which the Open Brethren owe their origin, first asserted in 1848, has been maintained throughout their history. In 1864 Lord Congleton, a leading Open Brother, said as follows:- "Every dear child of God that is walking consistently with such a profession, come he from whatever quarter he may, would be received." In 1872 Mr. Muller, another highly respected Open Brother asserted this principle in no uncertain language. He wrote as follows:- "All who love the Lord Jesus, and are fundamentally sound in the faith, we receive, though they may not be able, as we could wish, to forsake certain persons or views or systems. In this way we purpose to persevere, because we consider it God's order (Romans 15:7).

Again, we have received persons, these sixteen years, who came from persons preaching damnable heresies; but we examined them, and as we found them, sound or not in foundation truths, so they were received or rejected." In 1883 Mr. James Wright, another leader amongst the Open Brethren, stated that it was still the principle which guided the Open Brethren in their practice as to reception. He wrote as follows:- "In reply to your enquiry, the ground on which we receive to the Lord's Table is soundness in the faith and consistency of life of the individual believer. We should not refuse to receive one who we had reason to believe was personally sound in the faith and consistent in life, merely because he or she was in fellowship with a body of Christians who would allow Mr. Newton to minister among them." In 1921 the writer of "The Principles of Christians called 'Open Brethren'"* admits this principle. Describing the origin of Open Brethren, he says, on page 93, "The Bethesda Church, in which Messrs. Muller and Craik ministered, refused to admit any who were convicted of holding the evil doctrine themselves, but did not exclude those who came from Mr. Newton's meeting." Here then we have the fact admitted, without a word of disapproval, that while the Open Brethren would not receive anyone

convicted of holding evil doctrine, yet they would not exclude those who came from the meeting where the error was taught.

Finally an Open Brother, in a 1929 pamphlet entitled "The Local Assembly," says that the Open Brethren have strictly adhered to the "important principle" that in the matter of reception the only responsibility of an Assembly is "to deal with the actual beliefs and practices of any individual who might seek fellowship." Further this writer quotes with approval the extracts already given from the letter of the Ten, as well as the letter written by Mr. James Wright.

{*This book, written by an Open Brother, has been republished under the altered title "The Principles of Christian Brethren." The late Editor of The Witness J. R. Caldwell — referred to it as "the simplest but most concise and yet comprehensive account of the so-called 'Open Brethren' that we have seen. It states the history of the movement, the principal doctrines which have been maintained and contended for for over eighty years." We can therefore safely accept this work as a correct statement of their principles by one of themselves.}

Thus we have a chain of evidence from 1848 to 1929 proving that in the matter of reception the Open Brethren do not take into consideration the association of the one they receive, or to put this principle of reception quite plainly, they hold that association with those holding evil doctrine does not defile unless the evil doctrine is imbibed.

Such then is the 'open' principle of reception. Is this principle false or true. In attempting to answer this question we must ask not. "What does an Exclusive Brother say?" nor "What does an Open Brother say?" but, "What saith the Scripture?" In turning to Scripture let us keep clearly before our minds the question at issue. Does association with a teacher known to teach false doctrine defile; or must the false doctrine first be imbibed before defilement is contracted? In 2 John 1:10-11, we read, "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." This passage clearly contemplates two persons; one holding false doctrine as to the Person of Christ, the other a person who wishes him God speed. The passage does not say, or imply, that this second persons holds the false doctrine, but that he identifies himself, by an act of fellowship, with the man that does, and, so doing, God calls this person "a partaker of his evil deeds." If then God calls this man a partaker of evil deeds, he is surely a defiled man, and that, not because he has imbibed the evil doctrine but because he is knowingly associated with a man that holds the false doctrine. In the light of this Scripture how solemn is the statement, made by Mr. Muller, that the Open Brethren receive those "who come from persons preaching damnable heresies" providing they are found to be personally sound in foundation truths. Whether fully realized or not this means, as a matter of fact, that the Open Brethren receive persons that God calls "partakers of evil deeds."

Again we find this principle of the Open Brethren contradicted by 1 Corinthians 5:6, in the case of defilement by association with an evil doer. In this passage the Corinthian assembly is warned that "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." Does this mean that the Corinthian saints having remained in association with a man known to be incestuous had therefore all become incestuous? This indeed would be truly absurd. The clear meaning is surely that having remained in association with an incestuous man they had thereby become defiled. In like manner as we have seen, association with one holding evil doctrine caused defilement. It was not necessary for the

Corinthians to commit incest to contract defilement, nor for evil doctrine to be imbibed in order to be defiled. See also Galatians 5:7-9. In both cases it was the deliberate association with known evil that defiled.

Again, the apostle writing to the Corinthians, in his second Epistle, after they had dealt with the incestuous person, can say, "Ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter" (2 Corinthians 7:11). Obviously, then, until they had dealt with the matter they were not clear. But again we ask does this mean that they had all been guilty of incest? Surely not! but rather that they were all defiled, and having dealt with the man they were clear of defilement as far as his case was concerned.

These questions may well suffice to establish the principle that association with known evil defiles. But the principle is of such importance that we may be permitted to "Ask now the priests concerning the law." What will they tell us? The Lord instructs us how to put our question to the priests:- "If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any meat shall it be holy? And the priests answered and said, No. Then said Haggai, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean" (Haggai 2:11-13).

Here we have two questions. First, will that which is holy sanctify that with which it comes in contact? And the priests answer "No." Then we have a second question, Will that which is unholy defile that with which it comes in contact? And the priests tell us it will defile it. This second question is the one that immediately concerns us. One is unclean by a dead body, and whatever he touches becomes unclean. It is not first necessary for the thing touched to come into contact with the dead body in order to be defiled, for directly it comes into contact with the man who has touched the dead body it is defiled. Is it possible for a simple soul, unprejudiced by the theories of men, to arrive at any other conclusion than that these Scriptures plainly teach that association with a teacher known to teach false doctrine defiles, even though the doctrine itself has not been imbibed.

Alas! the force of these plain Scriptures has apparently been ignored in the Open Brethren system, as a method of reception has been adopted which opens the door to defilement by receiving persons without reference to their associations. In actual practice their system of independent meetings probably leads to very different methods of reception in different meetings. More godly care is exercised in some than in others. Doubtless in some meetings Letters of Commendation would be strictly required. In others strangers are invited to break bread. The extreme limit of the ’Open’ reception is seen in some meetings where all Christians present are invited to break bread. In such cases all godly care, and Scriptural order are abandoned. Do not the orthodox sects erect some barrier, however slight, around that which they reverently, even if erroneously, consider the Table of the Lord? In our private homes we would be extremely careful concerning inviting people of whom we know nothing to sit down at our tables. [No adequate comparison can be made with sitting down in the presence of the Lord of glory at HIS table under conditions suitable to, and enjoined by Himself, to remember Him.] (Paragraph edited. L.H.)

Before leaving the matter of reception it may be well to refer to Romans 15:7, "Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God." It will be noticed that in the extract given from Mr. Muller’s letter (page 6) he gives a reference to this passage as if it supports his

views. Many others have attempted to use this Scripture in a similar way. Is not this, however, a thoughtless perversion of Scripture to support particular views? Of this passage another has truly written, "I am convinced that the quotation of this passage (Romans 15:7) as a warrant for promiscuous assembly reception is totally irrelevant. The Epistle to the Romans is not dealing with assembly order at all. It is a question of individual blessing through the Gospel, and of whom we are to recognize in our individual walk as Christians (see verse 1). Even the one whose faith is weak, and who may practically put himself into bondage (Romans 14:1-23) is not to be ostracised. It is no question of the assembly receiving but of receiving one another, and individual receiving an individual. Moreover, how did Christ receive us? To the glory of God is the answer. It is no warrant for indiscriminate reception in any sense, but that in receiving we are exhorted to do so in view of all that suits the glory of God."

3. Independency of Meetings.

Independency of Meetings is a second characteristic of the Open Brethren. We find this principle plainly avowed in their writings and constantly acted upon in their practice. In a pamphlet recently written by an Open Brother, of which one of the main objects is the endeavour to justify this independency of meetings, he states the Open Brethren view to be as follows:-

"Open Brethren hold that the Lord intends each assembly to stand and to act for itself, according to His Word, directly responsible to Himself; having to deal only with individuals presenting themselves for communion; neither responsible for nor bound by, the church action of another assembly, but testing this by the Word when an individual therefrom presents himself, otherwise leaving it alone." It is plain therefore that the meetings connected with this system are so many separate meetings each acting for itself independently of any other assembly. They may indeed as Mr. Darby said, "respect one another and mutually accept each other’s discipline from each other, provided it be judged expedient, otherwise not."

It is constantly affirmed by those who seek to defend this independency of meetings that the only other alternative is a federation of assemblies, or a circle of meetings, controlled by a central authority. As a matter of fact neither alternative is true. There is however the truth of God as to the assembly, and this is found neither in independent assemblies nor in a confederation of assemblies. A confederation of assemblies is the principle that largely governs the great religious denominations of Christendom and, in principle, is pure sectarianism. The principle of independent assemblies leads to latitudinarianism, which allows of everybody’s will and tries nobody’s conscience.

What then, we may enquire, is the truth of Scripture. Turning to the first epistle to the Corinthians we find divine instruction for the ordering of the local assembly. This instruction is based upon two great truths: First, the truth of the fellowship into which believers are called, and, Second, the truth of the one Body. As to "the fellowship" we read, "Ye were called into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:9). The Apostle is going to instruct the Corinthian saints as to dealing with certain evils that had arisen in their midst. He lays the foundation for all his instruction by reminding them, and ourselves, that, in Scripture, as believers, we are viewed, not as members of a local meeting, or a local fellowship, but, irrespective of locality, nationality, or social position as being called into the fellowship of which Jesus Christ our Lord is the bond. It is in the light of this fellowship that the Apostle associates with the Church of God in Corinth "all that in

every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both their's and our's" (1 Corinthians 1:2). Such a fellowship has its privileges and responsibilities, to be carried out in dependence upon the Lord — the One who is the bond of the fellowship. The Lord is not simply the bond of a local meeting, nor is it only to such we receive, nor from such we put away. The Lord is the bond of the fellowship, and into this fellowship we receive, and from it we put away, if the sad necessity arises. When, in the end of Chapter Five, the Apostle speaks of the "within" and "without," he does not merely mean "within" or "without" of the local assembly at Corinth. The "within" was the whole assembly of God on earth, the "without" the whole world system.

It is obvious that a system of independent meetings has lost sight of the fellowship into which we are called and, more serious still, very largely ignores the Lordship of Christ in practice. Such may plead they are acting locally under the authority of the Lord but, if so, how can they ignore the fellowship of which the Lord is the bond? If we recognise a company of saints as walking in the truth of the fellowship, and under the authority of the Lord, we cannot disregard their acts, whether in reception or discipline, without ignoring the Lord. If their act is bound in heaven it is surely bound on earth in other assemblies.

Those who take this independent ground have little else before them but local fellowship, viewing themselves as members of a local meeting. Scripture, however, never so speaks: we are called into "the fellowship," and are members of the one Body. The local meeting may cease, or be unable to come together; the fellowship to which we are called remains whatever the vicissitudes of the local meeting.

Moreover we learn from 1 Corinthians 12:1-31 that there is one Body, formed by one Spirit, which embraces every true believer as we read:- "As the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles" (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). Then, having shewn that the one body includes all saints, and the very practical results flowing from this truth, the apostle says of the local assembly, "Ye are Christ's body, and members in particular" (N. Tr. 27). He does not say as in the Authorised Version, "Ye are the body of Christ" as if they formed the whole body of Christ," but simply "ye are Christ's body." That is to say, the local assembly was characteristically, and representatively, "Christ's body." A General might say to a local company of soldiers, "Remember you are Coldstream Guards." He would not say "You are the Coldstream Guards" because they do not form the whole regiment. But he reminds them that they are the local representatives of that famous regiment, and are expected to act and behave in view of the whole. So with a local assembly; if acting according to the light of Scripture it does so as representing the one body. It is perfectly true the local assembly is directly responsible to Christ as the Head of the body, but whether acting in reception, or discipline, in the name of the Lord Jesus, their act is not independent of all other assemblies, but is in view of the whole assembly and has a bearing which extends to the whole. So, too, when the local saints come together, in the exercise of their privileges, to break bread, they do so, not as members of a local meeting, but as members of the one body of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16-17). In this epistle the local assembly at Corinth is called upon to perform an act of discipline, in putting away a wicked man, but in this solemn act, as in all else, they were linked up "with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:2). In the light of these Scriptures it will be seen that the truth of the Church as the one body of Christ does not consist in a federation of assemblies, or a circle of meetings, on the

one hand; or of independent meetings on the other. The truth is, the assembly is one body, formed by one Spirit, Christ Himself being the Head, and all believers the members. And the local assembly, whether in its privileges or responsibilities, acts, not simply for itself, or for a circle of assemblies, but as representing the whole assembly viewed as the body of Christ.

It may be asked cannot mistakes be made in assembly action, and if so are we bound to accept some manifestly wrong judgment simply because it is the judgment of an assembly professing to act in the light of the Church under the direction of the Head? Admittedly serious wrongs have been done, and may be done, but, we may ask, are we to meet failure in the application of a divine principle by abandoning the principle; or seek to avoid difficulties by adopting a human principle? Have we no resources in the presence of such failure? Seeing we are members of one Body, can we not plead with those w ho have acted wrongly, to put the matter right? Have we not Christ the Head of the Body to whom we can turn and seek to reach our erring brethren through the Head? One has well written:-

"It is admitted that the assembly being a spiritual formation (for we have all been made to drink into one Spirit) it is incumbent that we be in a right spiritual state either to receive those who are scripturally commended, or to exclude those who should be scripturally excluded. Yet even where the principle is generally recognised, there will always be forthcoming instances of failure, where saints have allowed human influences to warp their judgment. The occurrence of rare cases where mistakes are made will remind us that no claim can be put in of infallibility in the church; and these instances require much patience, and the ministry of grace and truth from the Lord to put a wrong right. In all such matters He Himself is the one Resource to Whom we can turn. Where He has permitted a brother to be misjudged or misrepresented it is best for him to be submissive before the Lord, and to wait with a weaned and self-judging spirit for the Lord to clear him. To defy the decision and to escape the exercise by slipping into another company is to miss the blessing the Lord has for him behind the trouble."

4 Concluding Remarks.

Having briefly considered the two distinguishing principles of the Open Brethren system, we may ask ourselves, "What must be the effect of the adoption of these principles?"

It is obvious that where these principles are carried out in an extreme way people are received on their personal responsibility without any test. Where more care is exercised, it does not go beyond a personal test in the matter of reception, nor beyond a local meeting when it is a matter of excision.

Hence a principle of reception is adopted which opens the door to any evil; and a principle of independent meetings which prevents evil from being adequately dealt with. One principle lets in evil; the other, makes it impossible to effectually put it out. Mr Darby truly said this system of independent meetings, "Entails the consequence that I might participate in the exclusion of a wicked person in one meeting, and take the Lord’s Supper with him in another" (Col. Writing Vol. 33. 47).

Thus one of the most serious consequences of a system of independent meetings is the loss of true scriptural discipline. Instead of the discipline of the Church according to the promised presence of the Lord, and the guidance of the Spirit, such a system has only the discipline of a

voluntary association which makes rules for itself and either accepts, or rejects the discipline of other meetings, according to circumstances. Where a scriptural discipline cannot be maintained the order of the Church of God is set aside, leading ultimately to the loss of the truth of the Church Mr. Darby has clearly shewn how this loss must take place by an apt illustration; he says,

"Supposing we were a body of Freemasons, and a person were excluded from one lodge by the rules of the order, and instead of looking to the lodge to review the case, if it was thought to be unjust, each other lodge were to receive him or not on their own independent authority, it is clear the unity of the Freemason system is gone. Each lodge is an independent body acting for itself. It is vain to allege a wrong done, and the lodge not being infallible; the competent authority of lodges, and the unity of the whole is at an end. The system is dissolved. There may be provision for such difficulties. All right if it be needed. But the proposed remedy is the mere pretension of the superiority of the recusant lodge, and a dissolution of Freemasonry." On this Mr. Darby further remarks, "The Church is not a voluntary system. It is not formed (or rather unformed) of a number of independent bodies, each acting for itself. It was never dreamed, whatever the remedy, that Antioch could let in Gentiles, and Jerusalem not, and all go on according to the order of the Church of God. There is not a trace of such independency and disorder in the word. There is every possible evidence of, in fact, and doctrinal insistence on, there being one body on earth, whose unity was the foundation of blessing in fact, and its maintenance the duty of every Christian. Self-will may wish it otherwise, but certainly not grace, and not obedience to the word" (Col. Writings. Vol. 14. 464, 465). Is it not only too plain that, as a result of the adoption of these false principles, the truth of the Church has been largely obscured amongst the Open Brethren and increasingly they tend to become simply a gospel mission. In the light of the foregoing statements we judge that any assembly that acts on the principle of independency has forfeited its title to be owned as walking in the light of the Church.

It may be there are those in fellowship with Open Brethren who have little knowledge of the origin of the movement, even of the principles that distinguish it, still less of the bearing of these principles. Moreover the adoption of the principle of independency has doubtless led to very great diversity in their meetings, so, it may very well be true, that there are individual meetings who have in measure abandoned the above principles, but apparently they still maintain a link, by commendation and reception, with meetings that do maintain these principles. In spite of much evangelical zeal is it not painfully evident that in the Open Brethren movement, the gracious recovery of truth in the last century, has been largely neutralized by the introduction of an easy-going system of free-will and independency. By mainly confining their efforts to evangelical activity in proclaiming a gospel — largely reduced to meeting man’s need, and which appeals to the general run of Christians — the Open Brethren appear to have let slip the distinguishing truths of Christianity which unfold our present heavenly association with Christ, and God’s purposes for the glory of Christ in the Assembly. Moreover their system of independent meetings tends to exclude the authority of the Lord in the practical administration of it by the Spirit, and very largely confines "fellowship" to the local meeting. The Lordship of Christ and the "fellowship" into which all saints are called must lose their true significance in a system of independent meetings.

We may well ask, How can those whose eyes have been opened to see the truth have any fellowship with a system where the above principles hold sway; whether it be by the reception to the breaking of bread of those still identified with the Open Brethren, or by individuals going back

to minister in their meetings?

Those seeking to walk according to the truth of Scripture would surely exclude any thought of "membership of Brethren," and would be ready to receive all Christians sound in the faith, and free from evil in their associations, even though they may not have sufficient light, or faith, to sever their links with some ecclesiastical system. This surely is right, though, on account of the increasing corruptions of Christendom, the practice of this principle may become very limited and increasingly difficult. In the case however of the Open Brethren, their origin, their principles, and their practice, make it very difficult to apply this principle in the matter of receiving to the breaking of bread one still associated with them, except perhaps in the very rare case of an absolutely ignorant person. To return to them again under the plea of ministry, is surely building again the things that we have destroyed. To say the least, it shows that the one so doing sees no great evil in the system, has but little appreciation of divine principles, and has forgotten that, even if such a course be considered lawful, it may not be expedient. Moreover, it is possible, on the plea of service under the direct authority of the Lord, to be simply doing what is right in our own eyes, without consideration for the consciences of others — in other words, doing our own will.

We may conclude with the words of another:- "Satan wants God’s people to walk either with a narrow heart in a narrow path, which is sectarianism, or with a broad (that is, a large) heart in a broad way, which is latitudinarianism . . . No man on earth ever walked in such a narrow path as the Lord Jesus Christ; and none had such a large heart as He. May He give us grace to walk with a large heart in a narrow path." May we too be able to say with yet another, "We humbly submit to His word, confident that God will never abandon those who seek to obey Him; and that the word of God and the grace of the Church’s Head, suffice, and ever will suffice, at all times, for those who are satisfied to walk in littleness and unappreciated by the world."

APPENDIX "A." The Doctrinal Errors of B. W. Newton. As there appears to be some misapprehension as to the errors in B. W. Newton’s teaching, and even attempts at palliation, it seems advisable to give a summary of these false doctrines.

Mr. Darby summed up these errors in the following words:-

"Mr. Newton has taught that Christ was, from the position He was in by birth as a man and an Israelite, under the curse of the exiled family, not vicariously on the cross, but in His own relation to God; that He was under the doom of death, under the curse of the law, and had to work His way up to a point where God could meet Him; that He had the experiences which an unconverted elect man, if he felt rightly would have. These are not deductions, but the statements of Mr. Newton himself " (Col. Writings. Vol. 15. Page 182).

Mr. J. E. Batten, who was for a time associated with Mr. Newton at Plymouth, and therefore well acquainted with his views, has also summed them up in the following statement:-

1. That the Lord Jesus at His birth, and because born of a woman, partook of certain consequences of the fall, mortality being one, and, because of this association by nature, He became an heir of death, born under death as a penalty.

2. That the Lord Jesus at His birth stood in such relation to Adam as federal head, that guilt was imputed to Him, and that He was exposed to certain consequences of such imputation — as

stated in Romans 5:1-21.

3. That the Lord Jesus was also born as a Jew under the broken law, and was regarded by God as standing in that relation to Him: and that God pressed upon His soul the terrors of Sinai as due to one in that relation.

4 That the Lord Jesus took the place of distance from God, which such a person so born and so related must take, and that He had to find His way back to God by some path in which God might at last own and meet Him.

5. That so fearful was the distance. and so real were these relationships by birth and so actual were their attendant penalties of death, wrath. and the curse, that until His deliverance God is said to have rebuked Him, to have chastened Him, and this in anger and hot displeasure.

6. That because of these dealings from God, and Christ's sufferings under them, the language of Lamentations 3:1-66 and Psalms 6:1-10, Psalms 38:1-22, and Psalms 88:1-18, etc has been stated to be the utterance of the Lord Jesus while under this heavy pressure from God's hand.

7. That the Lord Jesus extricated Himself from these inflictions by keeping the law; and that at John's baptism the consequent difference in Christ's feelings and experience was so great as to have been illustrated by a comparison of the difference between Mount Sinai and Mount Sion or between law and grace.

8. That beside all these relations which Christ took by birth and their attendant penalties and inflictions, and His sufferings under the heavy hand of God, it has been further stated that He had the experience of an unconverted though elect Jew.

APPENDIX "B." The Facts as to the Acknowledgement of Error by Mr. B. W. Newton in 1847-48. In two recent pamphlets, by an Open Brother, there is a reprint of "A Statement and Acknowledgement Respecting certain Doctrinal Errors," by B. W. Newton. Apparently this Statement has been reprinted to prove, in the judgment of the writer, that Mr. Newton confessed and abandoned his fearful errors touching the Person of Christ. He speaks of this Statement as a "humble document" and asks, "Why so thorough a confession and withdrawal did not end the controversy?" He then gives what he judges to be the only answer. He says, it "must be that Mr. Newton's opponents had ceased to walk in love, and therefore certain carnal influences, such as bitterness, ambition, a party spirit, overcame them." The conclusions reached by this writer, at this late date, are so contrary to what Brethren have believed for eighty years, that it is well to refresh our memories by recalling the facts. They are as follows:- In the early part of 1847 it came to light that M. S. Notes of a Lecture on Psalms 6:1-10, by B. W. Newton, were being privately circulated, which contained fundamentally false doctrines concerning the Person of Christ and the Cross (See Appendix "A"). The matter having become public, Mr. Newton issued two further pamphlets, in which he elaborated and defended the doctrines in question. One paper was called "REMARKS ON THE SUFFERINGS OF THE LORD JESUS," and the second, "OBSERVATIONS ON THE DOCTRINES OF NOTES OF LECTURES ON PSALMS 23, 31, 38, CONCERNING THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST." The second paper was a vindication of the views expressed in the first tract against the charges of false doctrine.

These tracts called forth two pamphlets by J. N. Darby: one entitled, "OBSERVATIONS ON A TRACT ENTITLED, 'REMARKS ON THE SUFFERINGS OF THE LORD JESUS,' " and the other entitled, "A PLAIN STATEMENT OF THE DOCTRINE ON THE SUFFERINGS OF OUR BLESSED LORD, PROPOUNDED IN SOME RECENT TRACTS" (Both Pamphlets will be found in Vol. 15. of J.N.D.'s Collected Writings). In these pamphlets Mr. Darby gave copious extracts from Mr. Newton's tracts and thoroughly exposed the terrible character of his false teaching.

These papers by Mr. Darby opened the eyes of many who had been adherents of Mr. Newton. By them Mr. Newton was pressed to make a confession of his errors; the result being that he put forth a paper dated November 26th, 1847, entitled, "A STATEMENT AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT RESPECTING CERTAIN DOCTRINAL ERRORS.'' This is the paper that has recently been reprinted. To any one unacquainted with the facts, as must be the case with the majority of people to-day, this Statement might indeed appear to have been a very thorough confession and withdrawal of his erroneous views. However on closer examination it will be seen that this statement only confesses his false application of Romans 5:1-21 to the Lord Jesus. As to the two tracts above referred to — which it must be remembered contained the major part of his false teaching — he merely states, "I also request that they may be withdrawn for reconsideration." It is plain that he did not confess the errors of these tracts. Let it be clearly noted that the only false doctrine he confessed is that found in the second Article in J. E. Batten's statement printed in Appendix "A." The true character of this "Acknowledgement of Error" was exposed in a paper written by Mr. Darby entitled, "NOTICE OF THE STATEMENT AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF ERROR BY MR. NEWTON" (Collected Writings, Vol. 15.).

Furthermore many of the followers of Mr. Newton, amongst them Mr. Soltau and Mr. Batten, who were in fellowship with him at Plymouth, and who must therefore have been fully acquainted with all the details of this sad controversy, were so thoroughly dissatisfied with this confession that they refused to associate any longer with Mr. Newton and withdrew from his Meeting at Plymouth.

Some months after Mr. Newton's withdrawal of his two pamphlets for reconsideration, he published a further paper in July 1848, entitled, "A LETTER ON SUBJECTS CONNECTED WITH THE LORD'S HUMANITY." This paper was criticised in a pamphlet written by J. N. Darby entitled, "REMARKS ON A LETTER ON SUBJECTS CONNECTED WITH THE LORD'S HUMANITY" (Col. Writings, Vol. 15), in which he shows that the evil doctrines of Mr. Newton's previous tracts were fully maintained, and he exposes the worthless character of Mr. Newton's "Acknowledgement of Error."

Finally we must remember that this "Acknowledgement of Error" by Mr. Newton, was not only refused by Mr. Darby, but was also repudiated by Mr. G. Muller, a prominent leader amongst the Open Brethren. In answer to a letter from Mr. J. Deck, Mr. G. Muller wrote as follows:- Bristol, Dec. 12th, 1848. My dear Brother,

I thank you for the loan of the three letters which I return. I have never written to you on the subject of Mr. Newton's fearful errors on account of the great pressure of work; but as your letter calls for it, I just desire to tell you, dear brother, that not only have my eyes been opened long to the fearful errors contained in those two tracts but I have stated twice before the assembled church — in June and the beginning of July — this my judgment, as also before the abouring brethren the early part of June. My hope however was that poor Mr. Newton might recover himself out of the snare of

the devil as he had confessed the fearful error concerning the federal headship of Adam and had withdrawn those two fearfully erroneous tracts for reconsideration. When however the reconsideration came out and I found that, notwithstanding all the filing and polishing with regard to expressions, this last tract was nothing but a defence of those two former ones, I felt it my duty to change my way of acting and at full length did I expose, many weeks ago, these fearful errors which touch the very foundations of our holy faith. And since then I have perhaps ten times or more, before the assembled church, denounced in the strongest terms these fearful errors, and not only have I done so but eight or ten leading brothers besides. I only add that Mr. Newton's errors have few more decided opposers than myself and that Mr. Newton's friends are not a little displeased with me.

Ever yours affectionately in the Lord, (Signed) G. MULLER. The consideration of this brief history of the facts will make it abundantly clear, to any unprejudiced mind, that the "Acknowledgement of Error," by Mr. Newton, was Repudiated by sober brethren in his own meeting, by leading brethren amongst the so-called Exclusive Brethren — such as Mr. Darby, and by responsible brothers amongst the so-called Open Brethren — such as Mr. Muller.

It seems impossible to deny the fact that leading and responsible brothers, living at the time of controversy, and fully acquainted with all the details, whether among Exclusive or Open Brethren, were agreed that in spite of Mr. Newton's professed acknowledgement of error, he still maintained the evil doctrines of his two tracts. In further corroboration of this it may be stated that we are informed that in an article written by Mr. Newton so late as 1867, entitled "Christ our suffering Surety," there occurs the following passage concerning the Lord:- "Although it is true that the fires that burnt at Sinai did not envelope Him in their full devouring power until Calvary, yet those fires burnt against Him as the sinner's surety, always, and from time to time sent forth as it were, their lightning flash, scorching though not consuming." This blasphemous utterance concerning our Lord, would show that after twenty years reconsideration of his tracts he still held his false doctrines as to our Lord.

It is difficult to imagine that the Open Brother who has recently reprinted Mr. Newton's "Acknowledgement," would deliberately suppress the facts, and therefore we can only judge he is ignorant of them, or has forgotten them. We judge that the facts plainly show that Mr. Newton's "Acknowledgement" was rejected on all sides, in 1847-48, not, as this Open Brother now suggests, 1929, from lack of love, or from any carnal influences such as bitterness, ambition, or a party spirit, but out of loyalty to Christ and love to His people.

APPENDIX " C."

Interview between Mr. Darby and Mr. Muller. For many years there has been in circulation the story of a conversation. reported to have taken place. at an interview. between Mr. Darby and Mr. Muller in July 1849. The full facts of this story do not appear to be known for it is generally told with the omission of material facts, and, as thus presented, appears very much to the discredit of both Mr. Darby and Mr. Muller. As it has again appeared in this partial form, in a recent pamphlet by an Open Brother, it may be well to give the full story.

After the interview between Mr. Darby and Mr. Muller, in July 1849, a report was put about by a Mr W. H. S., a leading brother in the Bethesda fellowship, purporting to give the conversation that

took place between these two brothers. It was said that Mr. Darby, speaking of B. W. Newton's tracts, remarked to Mr. Muller, "As you have now judged the tracts, the reason why we should not be united no longer exists." To this Mr. Muller is reported to have replied, "I have only ten minutes now free, having an engagement at one o'clock, and therefore I cannot now enter on this subject; for you have acted so wickedly in this whole affair, that many things have to be looked into before we could be really united again." With this, it is said, the interview closed. This conversation has been taken to prove that in Mr. Darby's judgment all ground for separation was removed in 1849, and that henceforth it was only personal feeling between leaders that kept up the breach. From this it is argued that we can safely ignore the personal element and act upon Mr. Darby's reported statement that, "The reason why we should not be united no longer exists."

It may well be said, in reply to such an argument, that even if no reason existed in 1849 for the continuance of the separation, it does not follow that no reason exists for its continuance eighty years afterwards. If however the argument is perfectly sound, it manifestly all turns upon the truth of this reported conversation. The following part of the story, which is not generally told, absolutely denies the truth of the report. The letter from Mr. W. H. S., giving this report, was sent to Mr. Darby, to know if it was true. Here is Mr. Darby's reply:-

Dear Brother,

I send back S's letter. It is all of apiece, the same egregious self-sufficiency which has always misled him. As regards the statement of my interview with Mr. Muller, I had heard it before, and I have only to say; it is a total and absolute falsehood in every part and of it. I do not attribute it to Mr. S., but being given as coming from Mr. Muller, and having no reason to think it a pure invention of the relater, Mr. Muller and I having been alone, I can only esteem it, as I do, a deliberate falsehood on the part of Mr. Muller. It is too precise and totally contrary in everything to the truth to be anything else. You are at liberty to repeat my judgment if you wish. I am afraid sometimes that things are a great deal worse than I ever was inclined to think. The less you have to do with personal questions with them the better.

Affectionately yours in the Lord,

J. N. D. From this letter it is plain that Mr. Darby treated this report as "a total and absolute falsehood in every part and parcel of it." Moreover it is clear that there is no independent witness of what was said — no third person being present at the interview. We are dependent upon Mr. Darby or Mr. Muller for any information as to the conversation. If their report of the conversation unfortunately differs, we are compelled to leave the matter, as obviously no one can prove which is the correct version, whatever our private judgments may be. The only effect of the story, even if believed. can be to create prejudice against Mr. Darby: for it must be obvious that no conversation that took place between two brothers in 1849 can have any bearing on the principles and practices of the Open Brethren in 1929 nor of our judgment as to these principles and practices.

APPENDIX "D."

Reception from Open Brethren. In order to countenance the reception of a person wishing to break bread, who is still associated with Open Brethren, a letter written by Mr. Darby in November, 1878 has often been quoted. It is suggested that this letter shows that under certain circumstances Mr. Darby would have received such.

Now it is obvious that in the matter of reception, as in other matters, we must be guided by the principles of Scripture under the direction of the Lord and the guidance of the Spirit, and not act simply upon the 'ipse dixit' of Mr. Darby or any other servant of Christ. However we should rightly give weight to the judgment of Mr. Darby, therefore we will give the letter in full as printed in Vol. 3, page 447 (2nd Edition, page 561) of the Letters of J. N. D., so that the reader may judge if it supports reception from Open Brethren Meetings. Mr. Darby wrote as follows:-

Dear Brother, — I have no wish to keep the Bethesda question, not that I judge the evil as less than I thought it, but that from the length of time many there are mere dissenters, and know nothing of the doctrine; so that they are really in conscience innocent, though gone in there as they would into any dissenting place. If this brother had never had anything to do with Bethesda as such, I should have asked him nothing about it, as happens every day. But your account is that his separation was on account of looseness in discipline. What I think I should do would be not to discuss Bethesda but shew him, say J. E. B.'s confession, where he states what they taught, and ask him simply if he held any of these, as they were the things that had made the difficulty.

I should not ask anything about Bethesda. If he does not hold them I should not make any difficulty. I should gladly have patience with a godly brother who had seriously a difficulty. If it were merely wilful I do not feel that an assembly is bound to satisfy his wilfulness. This principle is recognised in 1 Corinthians distinctly. Otherwise one perverse person might keep evil in the assembly perpetually.

He would allege his conscience being governed by the word of God and not yours."

Nov. 1878.

It is quite clear that this letter refers to the reception of a brother who had already separated from Bethesda on account of looseness in discipline. The letter therefore does not touch the question of receiving one still associated with Open Brethren. The letter refers to the reception of two classes of persons. First those who have "never had anything to do with Bethesda as such." With such Mr. Darby would raise no question about Bethesda — their doctrines, principles, etc. Second, those who (like the brother referred to in the letter) have been associated with Bethesda but have separated from Bethesda. In such cases Mr. Darby's judgment was that, by reason of the lapse of time it would be unnecessary, in ordinary cases, to trouble them with all the details of the Bethesda matter, but simply shew them J. E. B.'s confession (Appendix "A") which states what B. W. Newton taught, and see if they are clear of these errors.

S. Philadelphia

Philadelphia.

Revelation 3:7-13. The Church has been left on earth to be a witness for Christ during the time of His absence. This is its great privilege, and this is its responsibility. In the addresses to the Seven Churches, the Lord, with eyes as a flame of fire reviews the whole history of the Church on earth in its responsibility to Himself. From this solemn review we learn: — First, that from the outset the Church, as a whole, has failed in its witness for Christ, and that the failure becomes more pronounced throughout the ages.

Secondly, we learn that in the midst of all the failure there has been throughout the ages, and will be to the end, those of whom the Lord speaks as overcomers, and who answer to His mind, and have His approval.

We learn, moreover, that the root of all the failure in witnessing for Christ, was that the Church left its first love for Christ, and that this will end in putting Christ outside the door. Having put the One for Whom it was to witness outside the door, the Church becomes a witness to itself and says, "I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing." Christ thus becomes intolerable to the professing Church, and the professing Church becomes nauseous to Christ.

Having the mind of Christ revealed to us, it will be possible, in the midst of the confusion, for the one that has ears to hear and a heart that desires to be faithful to the Lord, to refuse that which the Lord rebukes and follow that which He approves. In the measure in which we thus act we shall be able to meet and overcome the difficulties of the day, have the approval of the Lord at the present time, and receive the promised reward in the day to come.

Among the Seven Addresses, that to Philadelphia has a remarkable place, in that the Lord’s word to this Church is one of entire approval. It contains, indeed, a word of warning, but no word of rebuke. Surrounded by those who, on the one hand, were in the main marked by the corruptions of Thyatira and the lifeless profession of Sardis, and on the other hand, by the nauseous self-sufficiency of Laodicea, there was a company of saints who had the approval of the Lord. Does not the Lord thus indicate that in the last days of Christendom, marked on the one hand by the corruption of the Papacy and the lifeless profession that characterises Protestantism, and on the other hand by the boastful self-sufficiency of Modernism, there will be found until the end those that will have the approval of the Lord? This being so, if we desire to be of the company of those who answer to the Lord’s mind, we may well pay diligent heed to the Lord’s words to the angel of the Church in Philadelphia, so that we may learn, and seek to be marked by, the characteristics that He approves, take heed to His warning, and enjoy the support of His encouragement.

1. The Lord’s Presentation of Himself. In the addresses to the Churches the Lord generally presents Himself in a judicial character, seeing that there is so much that calls for condemnation. In this Church, where He finds that which He can approve, He presents Himself in His personal and moral perfections as "the Holy" and "the True." The Lord thus indicates the qualities that He

looks for in His people, and which alone can have His approval. If, in the midst of all the corruptions of Christendom, believers are to witness to Christ, they must above all else be morally like Christ.

He is, and ever was, "the Holy." He is "Holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners." It follows that all who call upon the Name of the Lord are responsible, not only to depart from iniquity, but to separate from vessels to dishonour, in order to be "sanctified, and meet for the Master's use." As "the True," He is absolutely faithful to God in His witness to the truth. All that He does, and all that He says, is in absolute perfection. He is nothing partially, He is everything perfectly. If He is the Light, He is "the true light;" if He is the Bread come down from heaven, He is the "true bread;" if He is the Vine, He is the "true Vine;" if He is the Witness, He is the "true witness." Does He bear record of Himself? His "record is true;" does He pass judgment? His "judgment is true."

Likeness to Christ as "the Holy" and "the True," will demand separation from the corruptions of Christendom, which find their greatest expression in Thyatira: from the lifeless formalism of Sardis; and the self-sufficiency of Laodicea.

Moreover, to meet the little strength of the Philadelphian Assembly, the Lord presents Himself with all power as having the key of David. He is One "Who opens and no one shall shut, and shuts and no one shall open." In the passage, in the prophet Isaiah, that presents Christ in this blessed way, we learn that government is in "His hand;" the key is on "His shoulder;" and all the glory of Israel as a nation "shall hang upon Him" (Isaiah 22:21-24). The mighty and irresistible power that He will soon exercise on behalf of His earthly people is now used on behalf of a feeble company at Philadelphia to remove every difficulty that would hinder their service for the Lord, and to meet every opposition by which Satan would seek to beguile them into a denial of pure Christianity by adopting a spurious Judaism

It has been pointed out by others that the character in which the Lord presents Himself, and the qualities which He approves in the Philadelphians, were perfectly set forth in Christ, Himself, when on earth. In every step of His path he was "the Holy" and "the True." He, too, was content to pass through this world in circumstances of weakness as the One Who became poor and had not where to lay His head. He was content to be treated as the offscouring of the earth, and to be trampled upon by men, for the sake of His own. Men may thrust Him out of their cities, and the Pharisees and Scribes, the Rulers and Priests, endeavour to shut the door against Him. But, we read, "to Him the porter openeth," and the sheep hear His voice. No power of the enemy can prevent the Lord finding His lost sheep, gathering them around Himself, and leading them home. And no power of the enemy can prevent the Philadelphian from answering to the Lord's mind and carrying out the Lord's word in a day of ruin.

2. The Lord's Word of Approval.

It is, at first sight, remarkable that, in an Assembly in which the Lord finds so much to approve, so little is said as to their works. In other addresses the Lord recounts the works; to this Assembly He simply says, "I know thy works." Of the Assembly at Ephesus the Lord has much to say of their works, but He rebukes them for having left their first love. In Philadelphia there was no great display of works that would bring them into prominence in the religious world, but there was a return to first love which was very precious in the eyes of the Lord. There is always a danger of

setting a high value on works which make something of ourselves before others, and over-looking the moral condition which is of the first consideration in the eyes of the Lord. The Philadelphian saints sought not the approbation of men: they were content with the approval of the Lord. It is enough for them that the Lord had taken account of their works. They rest in the fact that He had said "I know thy works."

If, however, the Lord has nothing to say of their works, He delights to bring before us the moral characteristics that are of such value in His sight. The Assembly at Philadelphia had four outstanding characteristics that drew forth the approval of the Lord:

First, the Lord says, "Thou hast a little strength;

Secondly, "Thou . . . hast kept my word;

Thirdly, "Thou . . . hast not denied my Name;

Fourthly, "Thou hast kept the word of my patience."

If, then, these are the characteristic marks that have the Lord’s approval we shall do well to consider His words, seeking to grasp their true import.

(1) "Thou hast a little strength." At the beginning of the history of the Church there was a mighty display of power in public testimony before the world. By the miraculous gift of tongues men heard of the wonderful works of God. "By the hands of the Apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people". (Acts 5:12). A multitude of people brought their sick to the Apostles and, we read, "they were healed every one" (Acts 5:16).

Let us, however, remember that in the day of this mighty display of divine power the sole authority of the Lord was recognised, the presence of the Holy Spirit was practically owned, and those "that believed were of one heart and one soul." All now is changed. Men have set aside the authority of the Lord; the presence of the Holy Spirit is ignored, and the people of God are divided and scattered. Thus the Church has entirely failed as a public and united witness for Christ in the world. As a result of this failure all outward display before the world has ceased. The sign gifts have been withdrawn, the power of healing is no more, speaking with tongues has ended, and the day of miracles has passed.

Let us then face the fact that we live in a day when the Church as a whole has entirely failed in its public witness before the world. In such circumstances to attempt to assume power before the world, the pretence of speaking with tongues, and exercising the gifts of healing, and the performance of miracles, is entirely contrary to the mind of the Lord. Moreover any such pretence entirely ignores the government of God that has withdrawn these sign gifts on account of the failure of the church. The Philadelphians made no such pretence. They did not seek for any place of prominence or distinction in the world. They did not, like those which "say they are Jews and are not," claim to be God’s people nationally. They assumed no title to a religious position on earth; they recognised they had but little strength. Nevertheless, the very expression "a little strength" supposes they had some strength. This is more than could be said of Sardis, or Laodicea. The Lord has to say of Sardis "thou art dead." A dead man has no strength. Of Laodicea the Lord says, "thou are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Such an one has no strength. Philadelphia has, indeed, only a little strength, but it is sufficient to rise above the deadness of

Sardis and the self-sufficiency of Laodicea, and so doing, it had the approval of the Lord. Moreover, it is in connection with their little strength that the Lord presents Him-self as the One that has the key, and therefore can command all circumstances in favour of His people. This does not imply any outward display of power before men, but power used on behalf of His people, as He can say, "Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it."

(2) "Thou hast kept my word." The second trait of the Church in Philadelphia, that met with the Lord's approval, was that, in the midst of the surrounding darkness, they kept the Lord's word. If then we desire to have this mark of the Lord's approval we shall do well to enquire into the significance of these words.

We live in a day when on every hand the word of God is being attacked in Christendom; and when professing Christians are denying the inspiration of the Scriptures. There are indeed those who rightly own the verbal inspiration of Scripture, and who stand for the absolute authority of the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible. Nevertheless, keeping Christ's word implies a great deal more than merely maintaining the authority of Scripture. A father might write a letter to two sons instructing them as to his purpose for them, and directing them as to their conduct. One son might raise questions as to the authenticity of the letter, while the other son indignantly repudiates such suggestions, and boldly maintains that from beginning to end the letter is authentic. And yet both sons might miss the Father's counsel contained in the letter, and be indifferent to his instructions. In like manner we may be zealous for the Bible, and nothing but the Bible, and yet be wholly ignorant of, or even indifferent to, the counsel of God contained in the Word. To confine keeping His word to the acknowledgement that the Bible is the inspired word of God would be to deprive the passage of its true meaning. Truly one could not keep His word without holding the inspiration of Scripture; but to keep His word is more than this. The word of God is the mind of God revealed to us. Christ's word is the whole mind of God as to Christianity, whether given directly from the Lord, as He can say, "I have given them thy words," or through the mouth of the Apostle Paul, to whom it was given "to complete the word of God" by unfolding the truth of Christ and the Church (Colossians 1:25-27). When the true meaning of Christ's word is apprehended we shall be stirred up and exercised, not simply to maintain the canon of Scripture, but, that we may know the mind of God for Christ and the Church; and, knowing His mind, that we may seek at all cost to answer to it.

It has been truly said, that, "God has given His mind in every age and time, and His people have been preserved and delivered from every difficulty in proportion as they have walked according to the revelation; while they have suffered as they have in any way departed from it."

Three conclusions may be safely drawn as to those who keep Christ's word. First, it would prove that such were a company who loved the Lord, for the Lord said to His disciples, "If a man love me, he will keep my words" (John 14:23). Secondly, it would imply they were a company cleansed from the defiling influences of the world, for, again, the Lord can say of His disciples, "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you" (John 15:3). Thirdly, it would suggest that they were a company set apart from the world and devoted to Christ, for the Lord prayed, "Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth." We may thus conclude from the blessed fact that they kept Christ's word, that they were a company that loved the Lord, that they were separate from evil, and devoted to Christ.

(3) "Thou . . . hast not denied My Name." The third mark in the Church at Philadelphia that had the Lord's approval was that they had not denied His Name. In a day when the Person of the Lord is being attacked, and the truths of His deity and incarnation are being denied it is of the first importance to unflinchingly maintain every truth of His glorious Person. Yet, not to deny His Name involves more than firmly asserting the truth of His Person.

We read, "There is none other Name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). To admit the possibility of salvation through any other would therefore be a denial of His Name.

Again, it is written, "Through His Name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins (Acts 10:43). Then to proclaim the forgiveness of sins through the absolution of a priest, or by any other means, would be a denial of His Name.

Moreover, it is written, "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My Name He will give it you" (John 16:23-26). We are thus exhorted to pray in His Name; therefore any prayer offered up in the name of Mary, or any other saint, would be a denial of His Name.

Further, the Lord tells us that, "Where two or three are gathered together in My Name there am I in the midst" (Matthew 18:20). The Name of Christ then is the alone gathering centre for His people. To gather together in the Name of any man, ecclesiastical or political, who assumes an official hereditary position, or is appointed by men, as a leader among God's people, is to deny His Name.

Then we are instructed to exercise the discipline that maintains the holiness of God's house, "In the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 5:4). To refuse to exercise such discipline would be indifference to holiness and a denial of His Name.

Finally, in view of the corruptions of Christendom, we read, "Let every one that nameth the Name of Christ depart from iniquity" (2 Timothy 2:19). His Name demands separation from iniquity. For a believer to be knowingly linked up with iniquity is the denial of His Name.

Thus not to deny His Name implies, not only that we maintain the truth of His Person, but, that we refuse to substitute any other name for salvation, for forgiveness, for prayer, for gathering together, for the exercise of discipline, and for separation from iniquity. If then we desire to have the mark of the Lord's approval we must walk apart from everything that, in these different ways, is a denial of His Name.

(4) "Thou hast kept the word of My patience." As foretold by the Lord in the parable of the ten virgins, the blessed hope which characterised the Church at the beginning has been long lost by the professing church. But for the last century the hope has been revived, and the cry has gone forth, "Behold the Bridegroom cometh" To the Church at Philadelphia the Lord can say, "Behold, I come quickly." This blessed truth is very generally held and taught by evangelical Christians, but to keep the word of Christ's patience involves more than holding the truth of the Second Advent, and looking for the return of the Lord. As the Lord passed through this world His enemies charged Him with having a devil, with being mad, with being a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber. They heaped every insult upon Him, spat in His face, crowned Him with a crown of thorns, and nailed Him to a cross. All these insults only brought out the perfect patience of Christ in the presence of His enemies. He submitted without complaint, and to all men's insults He answered never a word.

The patience of Christ in the presence of His enemies, that was so perfectly expressed in His pathway through this world, is still the patience that marks Christ now that He is in the glory. He is not indifferent to the hard speeches which ungodly sinners speak against Him; He is not unmindful of the persecutions, afflictions, insults, and martyrdoms that His people may be called to endure, but, in patience, He bears with it all during this time when God is dealing in grace towards a guilty world. The whole of this present period, in which Christ is seated at the right hand of God, is the time of His patience. God's word to Christ is "sit Thou at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool" (Psalms 110:1). The time is coming when the Lord will deal in judgment with all His enemies, put down all evil and reign in righteousness. Today He is gathering His friends out of the world; in the day that is so soon coining He will deal with His foes in the world. When on earth, Christ witnessed a bold confession to the truth; He exhibited the character and maintained the glory of the Father; but, in the presence of opposition and insults, "He opened not His mouth." When He was reviled, He reviled not again. He suffered in patient silence. If Christ acted in patience, and if Christ is still waiting in patience, it is our part to wait also in patience. We are called to follow His steps. So doing, we shall boldly witness for the truth, seek to honour the Name of Christ by exhibiting the character of Christ; but, in the presence of persecution and insults we shall be silent, not seeking to revenge ourselves, but waiting in patience until Christ, at His coming, will recompense tribulation to those that trouble His people (2 Thessalonians 1:6). So the Apostle James exhorts, "Be patient, therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord" (James 5:7). Again, the Apostle Paul can say, in the presence of all the "reproaches and afflictions" that the saints may be called upon to face, "Ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry" (Hebrews 10:36-37).

Keeping the word of His patience, we shall not only look for the coining of Christ but, in the presence of reproaches, afflictions and insults, come from what quarter they may, we shall exhibit the character of Christ by meeting all in the patience of Christ.

These, then, are the great characteristics that, in a day of ruin and confusion have the approval of Christ. All around there is the assumption of power, ecclesiastical and temporal, but no strength to rise above the corruptions of Christendom and enable the great profession to keep His word and not deny His Name. In Philadelphia there was no assumption of outward power, but there was a little strength that enabled them to escape the corruptions around, to keep Christ's word, not deny His Name. and to keep the word of His patience.

3. The Word of Warning and Encouragement.

Those who seek to keep the word of Christ and not deny His Name will find that the greatest opposition will come from those "which say they are Jews and are not." This surely represents those who, instead of having Christ before them as "the Holy" and "the True," set up a system of religion after the Jewish order. Such systems are marked by tradition, ordinances, and ceremonies, that can be carried out by the flesh, without any personal faith in Christ. They accredit the flesh but leave the heart far from God, and the conscience untouched.

Such systems loom largely before the world, while the Philadelphians, with their little strength, are hardly noticed, or if noticed only to be despised. Nevertheless, the day is coming when all will be reversed; when those who have been highly approved by the world will have to learn that the

people whom they despised and opposed, are approved and loved by the Lord. In the presence of this opposition, the Lord’s word of approval is followed by the Lord’s words of warning and encouragement. The need for the warning indicates, that in the presence of opposition there is the danger of letting go the things that the Lord approves. We may be sure that what the Lord approves, the devil will oppose. If the Lord says, "Hold fast," the devil will tempt to let go. The Lord had said to this Assembly, "Thou hast a little strength;" "Thou . . . hast kept my word;" "Thou hast not denied My Name;" and "Thou hast kept the word of my patience." Now He says, "Hold fast that which thou hast" "My word," "My Name," and "the word of My patience." The characteristic traits that the Lord approves in the Church at Philadelphia are the very things that professing Christendom has failed to maintain. To hold fast that which the mass has let go will entail conflict and opposition. Under the strain of this continual conflict that keeping Christ’s word, and not denying His Name, will entail, and to escape the reproach and obscurity of a little strength, there is the ever present temptation to turn aside to a wider and more popular sphere, and an easier path. There, indeed, we may escape conflict and reproach, but we may also lose our crown. In the presence of this temptation we have not only the Lord’s warning against giving up, but also His encouragement to hold fast. First, He encourages us by saying, "Behold I come quickly." If we are warned to "hold fast," and if holding fast entails conflict, let us remember it will not be for long. He is coming quickly.

Secondly, the Lord tells us there is a crown for the one that holds fast. We may have opposition to face, conflicts to endure, reproaches and insults to meet, but the crowning day is coming by and by.

Thirdly, the Lord unrolls before us the glorious future and thus gives us a glimpse of the coming day with its bright rewards. The one who has been content with a little strength in the time of Christ’s rejection will be displayed as a pillar of strength in the day of His glory. The one who has kept His word as to the Church, in the day when the great profession utterly ignored the truth, will be displayed as belonging to the Church in the day when the Church descends from heaven resplendent in all the glory of the New Jerusalem. The Name of God and the name of the city of God will be written upon that one. Those who have not denied Christ’s Name, when the professing mass dishonoured that Name, will come forth with His New Name upon their brow, for "they shall see His face; and His Name shall be in their foreheads."

It has been pointed out how frequently the little word "My" is used in this address. It very blessedly indicates the identification of these saints with Christ in time and eternity. Christ can say of those who in the day of His rejection are linked up with "My Name" and "My word," and the word of "My patience," that they will be identified with the temple of "My God," the Name of "My God" the city of "My God," and "My new Name."

Such then are the Lord’s words of approval, warning and encouragement, and, as we heed His words we shall find definite direction and guidance in the midst of all the corruption of Christendom, and the confusion amongst His true people. By His word of approval we know what meets His heart in these difficult days; with His word of warning we know where our danger lies; and with His word of encouragement we know the glory that is before the one that overcomes by holding fast in the presence of all the opposition of men and all the power of the devil.

H. Smith.

S. Psalm 23

Psalms 23:1-6 "The Lord Is My Shepherd"

Hamilton Smith.

He knows His sheep;

He counts them and He calleth them by name.

He goes before;

They follow as He leads, through flood or flame. The Twenty-third Psalm unfolds before us the blessings of one who takes his journey, through this world, with the Lord Jesus as his Shepherd. The Psalm is closely connected with the preceding Psalm, as well as the one that follows. All three Psalms are of outstanding beauty and value, seeing that in each one Christ is the great theme. Psalms 22:1-31 presents the Lord Jesus as the Holy Victim offering Himself without spot to God, on the cross, in order to meet the holiness of God and secure His sheep. Psalms 23:1-6 presents the Lord Jesus as the Shepherd leading His sheep through a wilderness world. Psalms 24:1-10 presents the Lord Jesus as the King — the LORD of hosts — bringing His people into the kingdom glory. The Psalm opens with the great statement, "The LORD is my Shepherd." Every believer can say, "The Lord is my Saviour"; but have we all definitely submitted to His leading, so that we can each say, "The LORD is my Shepherd"? He has told us that He is "the Shepherd"; but have we each told Him, Thou art "my Shepherd"? Have we not only accepted Him as our Saviour who has died for us to save us from our sins, but also submitted to Him as our Shepherd to lead us home through all our difficulties?

Let us think for a moment of a flock of sheep without a shepherd. They are needy, foolish, weak and timid creatures. If left to themselves to take their way through a wilderness scene, what would happen? Being hungry creatures they would soon starve; being foolish, they would wander and lose their way; being weak, they would grow weary and fall by the way; and being timid, they would flee before the wolf and be scattered. In contrast, let us ask, What will happen if the sheep take their journey under the guidance of the shepherd? Now, if the sheep are hungry, the shepherd is there to guide them into green pastures; are they foolish, he is there to keep their wandering feet; are they weak, the shepherd is present to gently lead his sheep and carry the lambs; are they timid, he is in front to lead them through the rough valleys, and defend them from every foe.

Plainly, in a flock without the shepherd everything depends upon the sheep, and this must lead to disaster. It is equally plain, that if the shepherd goes before, and the sheep follow, it will mean a safe journey for the sheep with manifold blessing by the way.

This, indeed, is the picture that truly represents the journey of the Christian flock through this world; for does not the Lord, Himself, say that He is "the Shepherd of the sheep," that "He calleth His own sheep by name," that "He goeth before them, and the sheep follow; for they know His

voice" (John 10:2-4).

Psalms 23:1-6 sets before us this blessedness of the Shepherd going before, and the sheep following. We, alas! in our self-confidence, may at times get in front of the Shepherd; or, growing careless, we may lag far behind. But granted the two conditions — that the Shepherd leads the way, and we follow — we can count upon the support of the Shepherd in every difficulty that we have to meet. The Psalmist touches upon seven different circumstances that we may be called to face:

1. Our daily needs.

2. Our spiritual needs.

3. Our failure and dullness of soul.

4. The shadow of death.

5. The presence of enemies.

6. The daily round.

7. The prospect of eternity.

All these things may, in varied ways and at different times, cross our paths, and, if left to face them in our own strength, will surely overwhelm us with dread and disaster. Nevertheless, with the Lord as our Shepherd, to lead the way, we can with confidence face the journey that leads to glory, in spite of the difficulties that may lie in the path. As every blessing in the Psalm flows from the first great statement, "The LORD is my Shepherd," we may very well preface each verse with these words, "The LORD is my Shepherd."

First (v. 1), there are the daily needs of the body. How are they to be met? The Psalmist does not say, "I hold a good office, I shall not want"; or, "I have kind friends who will care for me, I shall not want"; or "I have ample means, I shall not want"; or "I have youth, and health, and abilities, I shall not want." In all these ways, and many others, the LORD may meet our wants, but of none of these means does the Psalmist speak. He looks beyond all second causes, and providential ways, and he sees the LORD; and with the LORD going before, and he himself following, he can say, "The LORD is my Shepherd, I shall not went."

Secondly (v. 2), in the wilderness path there are not only temporal wants, but spiritual needs. For the Christian the world around is an empty wilderness. There is nothing in all its passing vanities to feed the soul. Its pastures are dry and barren; its waters, only waters of strife. If "the LORD is my Shepherd," He will lead me into His green pastures and beside the still waters.

How quickly the pleasures of this world pall, even upon its votaries. The spiritual food provided by the Shepherd is ever fresh, for He leads into the "green pastures." Moreover, the Shepherd not only feeds, but satisfies, for He makes His sheep to "lie down in green pastures." No hungry sheep would lie down in the midst of plenty. It would first feed, and when full lie down. Furthermore, the Shepherd leads beside the still waters. The waters of the stream that makes most noise, and show, are ever where the rocks are most abundant and the waters shallow. The still waters are quiet but deep. The Shepherd can calm our souls, and quench our spiritual thirst with the deep

things of God far removed from the noisy and shallow strifes that occupy men, and too often distract the Christian.

Thirdly (v. 3), as we pass through this wilderness world we may fail in following the Shepherd; and, apart from actual failure, we may grow weary in the way and dull in our affections. Even so, if "the LORD is my Shepherd" "He restoreth," or "reviveth," my soul. Let us, however, remember it is "He," Himself, that "restoreth." It almost seems, at times, as if we think that when we have grown weary of our wanderings, we can restore ourselves by our efforts and in our own time. It is not so. We can wander; He alone can restore. Naomi, restored from her wandering in the land of Moab, can say, "I went out," but, she adds, "the LORD hath brought me home again." She says, as it were, "I did the going out, but the LORD did the bringing back." Blessed be His Name, He can, and He does, restore. Were it not so, the people of God on earth would be little more than a great company of backsliders.

Moreover, He does not only restore, but having restored, He leads us into "the paths of righteousness for His name's sake." Alas! how often we may even in sincerity and zeal turn aside into paths of self-will, that are inconsistent with His Name, only to prove how little, in practice, we allow the LORD to lead us as our Shepherd. The path of righteousness, in which He leads, is a "narrow way" in which there is no room for the self-confidence of the flesh, and can only be trodden as we have the LORD as our Shepherd before us. Even so an Apostle found, when with real sincerity and zeal, and yet with great self-confidence, he said, "Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death."

Fourthly (v. 4), we have to face "the valley of the shadow of death." Even if we are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, and have not personally to pass through death, yet, again and again, we have to face that dark valley as, one by one, our loved ones are taken from us. Then, in a wider sense, what is our passage through this world but a journey through the valley of the shadow of death? For, over all there sounds the toll of the passing bell.

Nevertheless, if the LORD is our Shepherd, we can say with the Psalmist, "I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me." The Lord can say, "If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death" (John 8:51). The Lord does not say, he will not pass through it, but he shall not see it. Those who stand round the death-bed of a dying saint may indeed see death, but the one that is actually stepping down into the dark valley sees JESUS. Even so, if we have to pass that way it is only passing "through." And the journey through is very short; for is it not written, "Absent from the body . . . present with the Lord." And in that passage through the valley, not only is the Lord with us, but He is present with His rod and His staff — the rod to drive off every foe, the staff to support us in all our weakness.

Fifthly (v. 5), in this wilderness world we are surrounded by enemies that would rob us of the enjoyment of our blessings, and hinder our spiritual progress. But the LORD is our Shepherd who prepares a feast for us in the very presence of our enemies. And not only so, He prepares His people for the feast, for He anoints the head with oil, and not only fills the cup, but makes it run over. He does a great deal more for us than ever we did for Him in the days of His flesh; for, though one of the Pharisees desired Him that He would eat with him, and in wonderful grace the Lord sat down to meat in the Pharisee's house, yet, He has to say, "My head with oil thou didst not anoint."

Sixthly (v. 6), there is the daily path that we have to tread "all the days" of our lives. Each day of our life brings its ceaseless round of duties, difficulties, and circumstances, small and great. But if we follow the Shepherd we shall find that "goodness and mercy" will follow us. Were we nearer the Lord, following hard after the Shepherd, should we not with clearer vision trace His hand in the little things of the daily life, and discover therein His goodness and mercy?

Seventhly, and lastly, looking beyond the days of our life into the great eternity that stretches beyond we see that if the LORD is our Shepherd, it is, not only to lead us through the wilderness, but, at last to bring us home to "dwell in the house of the LORD for ever." For the Christian it is the Father’s house; there to dwell beyond all bodily wants, with every spiritual longing met, where no failure can intrude, no hearts grow cold, no shadow of death can come, no enemy approach, but where, indeed, the cup will run over. "The days of my life" will end "in the house of the LORD for ever." In that great home gathering not one of His sheep will be missing. "Those that Thou gayest Me I have kept, and none of them is lost" (John 17:12). Long years ago the saintly Rutherford wrote, "What think ye of His love? What of these feet that went up and down the world to seek His Father’s lost sheep, pierced with nails? The eyes that were oft lift up to heaven unto God in prayer, wearied with tears? His head pierced with thorns? The face that is fairer than the sun, all maimed, and the hair pulled out of His cheeks? He took shame and gave you glory. He took the curse, and gave you the blessing, He took death, and gave you life . . . As the Chief Shepherd, He shall make an account of all His lambs, and tell His Father, these be all My sheep. I went through woods and waters, and briers, and thorns, to gather them in, and My feet were pricked and My hands and My side pierced, ere I could get a grip of them; but now here they are."

Remembering all that He has done for us in the past, when, as the Good Shepherd, He gave His life for the sheep; knowing all that He will yet do for us when He comes as the Chief Shepherd, we may look up into His face during our present wilderness journey and say, "THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD."

We follow in His footsteps;

What if our feet be torn? Where He has marked the pathway All hail the briar and thorn.

S. Seven Exhortations.

Seven Exhortations.

Php 4:1-9.

Hamilton Smith. The first nine verses of the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Philippians bring before us the seven closing exhortations of the Epistle. These exhortations were never more important, and comforting, than in these last difficult days. The day of grace draws to its close. Evils, within and without, oppose us. To meet these different trials we have the encouragement of these seven exhortations, which, if taken to heart and carried out, will lift us above the sorrows of the way and guide us through every trial.

1 "Stand fast in the Lord" (v. 1) This great exhortation brings before us our resource in the presence of every kind of opposition. When the Apostle gave us this word, he, himself, was in bonds — the prisoner of the Lord. Within the Christian circle he was opposed by jealous men who were even preaching Christ out of envy, strife, and contention seeking to "arouse tribulation" for him (Php 1:15-16). Outside it adversaries were plotting for his life (Php 1:28).

Nevertheless, he is not cast down nor overcome by one or the other. Do professors seek to add to his afflictions by preaching out of envy; then, at least, he can rejoice that Christ is preached. Do adversaries seek his life? He is not terrified.

What then sustained him, and enabled him to stand unshaken in the presence of every opposition? It was this, his confidence was entirely in the Lord — in a word, he stood fast in the Lord. And having experienced the sustaining grace and support of the Lord, he passes on the exhortation to the saints of all ages. In the presence of every opposition we may have to meet, he says, "Stand fast in the Lord." The adversaries without, and the "envy", "strife" and "contention," within the Christian circle, that existed even in the Apostle’s day, have increased on every hand in our day. Yet we have this comforting exhortation, "Stand fast in the Lord."

We are neither exhorted, nor expected, to stand fast in our own strength, or knowledge, or wisdom. We are to stand fast against every effort of the enemy to further break up and divide the people of God, whether from within or without, by standing fast in the strength of the Lord, the living Lord, who is exalted above every name, and is "able even to subdue all things unto Himself" (Php 2:9; Php 3:21).

2 "Be of the same mind in the Lord" (v. 2)

Nothing is more distressing to the heart, and enfeebling to testimony, than the differences of judgment that exist among the true people of God. In the second chapter of the Epistle the Apostle traces all envy and strife to this one root — "Vainglory" (Php 2:3). Even in the very presence of the Lord, there was a strife among the Apostles because each wanted to be accounted the greatest (Luke 22:24). So, in the Apostle’s day, there was strife, as the result of the vainglory of some who wanted to be great. And in our day, all the division and strife that has come in among the people of

God can be traced to this one root — someone wanted to be great. The vainglorious man will ever be an envious man — jealous of every one that is more spiritual or more gifted than himself. And jealousy expresses itself in malice, and malice ends in strife (James 3:14-16).

How, then, can we "be of the same mind in the Lord"? The Apostle clearly shows that this can only be as we are marked by "lowliness of mind," and, to have the lowly mind, he says, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." His was the lowly mind that led Him to make Himself of no reputation in order to serve others in love. Self likes to be served, and thinks it is exalted when being served by others; but love delights to serve.

If, then, we each forget self, refuse to seek a reputation for ourselves, and seek only to serve others in love, according to the lowly mind of Christ, we shall have the mind of the Lord, and "be of the same mind in the Lord."

3 "Rejoice in the Lord alway" (v. 4) The Apostle has been telling us:

(1) that within the Christian circle there are some marked by envy, strife, and contention;

(2) that all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's;

(3) that many walk in such a way that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ.

Alas! these things are still found among the people of God, and may well call forth sorrow and tears, even es they did with him. But the Apostle tells us more; he not only looks abroad and sees the failure of the saints, but he looks up and sees the glory of Jesus. He sees Christ in the glory, the prize of the calling on high (Php 3:14). He sees that God has called us to be with Christ and like Christ in glory, and he sees the blessed end of the wilderness journey with all its sorrows and failure. With this glorious end in view, he forgets the things that are behind and presses on to the goal.

Moreover he not only looks up to Christ in the glory, but he looks for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to change our bodies of humiliation into bodies of glory. Looking around he may weep, but looking up, and looking on, he rejoices, and exhorts us to "Rejoice in the Lord alway."

We cannot rejoice in ourselves, our service, or our walk: we cannot always rejoice in our circumstances or in the saints. But with the living Christ on high, and the coming Christ before us, we can "Rejoice in the Lord alway."

4 "Let your gentleness be known of all men. The Lord is near" (v. 5, N. Tr.)

It is only as we walk with the Lord before us, according to the first three exhortations, that we shall be able to carry out this exhortation which sets before us the character of gentleness by which we should be known of all men. Too often we are known for our self-assertiveness, for our strong opinions, and perhaps violence of expression, in relation to the affairs of this world. If our minds are set on things above we shall not be eager to assert ourselves in regard to things on earth. As to these matters we do well to yield to others and be reticent of asserting our opinions. Thus we shall wear the beautiful character of Christ who was marked by "meekness and gentleness" (2 Corinthians 10:1). We are to beware of being drawn into strife with those who may oppose, for "the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men" (2 Timothy 2:24). Let us remember

it is more important to exhibit the character of Christ, than to assert our opinions, even if right, or to defend ourselves. Men can oppose our opinions, our assertions, and our violence; but who can stand against gentleness? As one has said, "Gentleness is irresistible."

Moreover, to encourage us to gentleness, the Apostle reminds us that "the Lord is near." There is no need for us to assert ourselves and seek to put the world right, for the coming of the Lord is near, and at His coming He will right every wrong. May we not also say that, in another sense, the Lord is near to us, however little we may realize His presence. He hears and sees all that we say and do. How many a hard and violent word we may have uttered in unguarded moments that would never have been said had we realized His presence. The disciples, in their hardness, rebuked the mothers who brought their little ones to Jesus. The Lord, in His gentleness said, "Suffer little children and forbid them not to come unto Me." Again, the disciples, in their resentment against villagers that refused to receive the Lord, would, with violence, bring down fire from heaven to destroy them. The Lord, in His gentleness, utters no word against His rejectors, but quietly passes on to another village. May we then so speak and act while pursuing a separate path as the quiet in the land, that, if the world takes any account of us, it will only be to mark our "gentleness."

5 "Be careful for nothing" (v. 6)

Here the Apostle’s exhortation has in view the circumstances of life. He is not unmindful that, in a world of sorrow and sickness, of want and care, there will be trials to face and burdens to be borne; but, he would not have us racking our poor hearts with them. He, himself, writes from a prison, and had suffered want, and a companion and fellow-labourer had been sick nigh unto death; but in these sorrowful circumstances he had been lifted above all anxious care, and therefore can say to others, "Be careful for nothing."

We may have to face trials in our families, trials in our businesses, trials amongst the Lord’s people; sorrows from sickness, sorrows from want, sorrows from the saints, that press upon us as a great burden and, as one has said, "How often a burden possesses a person’s mind, and when he tries in vain to cast it off, it comes back and worries him."

How then can we find relief? How is it possible to "Be careful for nothing"? Very blessedly the Apostle unfolds the way to be free, not necessarily of the trial, but of the burden of the trial, so that it no longer weighs the spirit down with care and anxiety. He says, "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." Thus only shall we find relief. "In everything," whatever the trial may be, small or great, make it known to God in prayer; and tell God exactly what you wish, "let your requests be made known to Him." The requests may not be for our good, they may not be according to the mind of God; they may even be foolish, but we are to make them known to God.

What will be the result? Will He answer the requests? Will He remove the trial? He may see that to answer the request, or remove the trial would not be for our good. So far as the immediate trial is concerned, He will act in perfect wisdom for our good, according to His perfect love. But this God will do; He will relieve our hearts from the burden of the trial. If we pour out our hearts before Him, He will pour in His peace into our hearts — that peace of God which passeth all understanding. So Hannah found, in the days of old, when, in her sore trial she could say, "I . . . have poured out my

soul before the Lord." In result, we read, "Her countenance was no more sad." And yet, at the time, her circumstances were just the same. Afterwards, indeed, the Lord changed her circumstances, but first He showed that He had the power to change Hannah. From grief of heart, and bitterness of soul she was brought into great peace — the peace of God which passeth all understanding — through making known her requests to God (1 Samuel 1:6-18).

6 "Think on these things" (v. 8).

Rejoicing in the Lord, and set free from care, we shall be able peacefully to delight our souls in the things that are pure and praiseworthy. In a world far from God we are continually faced with evil. It is in us and around us; it presses upon us from every side. At times we have to face it and deal with it in ourselves, or others; but, even so, to have to do with evil, in any form, is defiling, and soiling to the mind. Alas! there is often with us a tendency to pry into evil, and to be over-busy in contending against it!

God would have us to find our delight in all that is true, and noble, and just and pure. The flesh in us is ever ready to listen to slander, and bad reports, and things that are vicious and blameworthy. But says the Apostle, listen to the good report, and if there is anything virtuous and praiseworthy in your brother, "think on these things. "

7 "Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you" (v. 9) The mind being set on things which are pure will prepare the way for a life that is according to God. Right "thinking" will lead to right "doing." Having said of the things that are pure, "think on these things," the Apostle now says, "Those things which . . . ye have seen in me do."

It is not enough to have "learned" and "received" the truth, through the Apostle’s writings, or to have "heard" it from his lips and "seen" it in his life. What we have learned, and received, and heard, and seen, is to be translated into our lives. We are, as another Apostle has said, to be "doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22).

Then, says the Apostle, if our minds are set on things that are pure, and our lives in accordance with the truth — if we "think" and "do" rightly — we shall find that not only the peace of God keeps our hearts, but that the God of peace will be with us. In spite then of all the failure of the Church and the trials by the way, how blessed the portion of those believers who Stand fast in the Lord; Have the same mind in the Lord;

Rejoice in the Lord; Who are known of all men for their gentleness; Who are careful for nothing; Who have their minds set on things that are pure, and Who, in practice, "do" the things they have learned and received.

Such will have their hearts governed by the peace of God, and will enjoy the support of the God of peace. In all these exhortations/here is nothing that cannot be carried out by the simplest and youngest believer, in the power of the Holy Spirit. They demand no special gift; they require no great intellectual attainment. They form the very essence of practical Christian life, and are as applicable in these last difficult days as in the early days of freshness and power.

Thus ever on through life we find, To trust, O Lord, is best, Who serve Thee with a quiet mind Find in Thy service rest. Their outward troubles may not cease, But this their joy will be —

Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace Whose mind is stayed on Thee.

S. Short Papers on the Church.

Short Papers on the Church.

Hamilton Smith.

(also published as 'Perspectives on the True Church') 1. The Church Prophetically Announced Matthew 16:1-18; Matthew 18:15-20

2. The Church in Actual Existence Acts 1:1-26, Acts 2:1-47, Acts 3:1-26, Acts 4:1-37, Acts 5:1-42, Acts 6:1-15, Acts 7:1-70, Acts 8:1-40, Acts 9:1-43 3. The Church in the Counsels of God Ephesians 1:1-23, Ephesians 2:1-10 4. The Church in the Ways of God Ephesians 2:11-22 5. The Church as Administered by Paul Ephesians 3:1-21 6. The Church as the House of God According to the Mind of God 7. The Church as the House of God in the Hands of Men 8. The Church as the Body of Christ 9. The Church as the Body of Christ 1 Corinthians 12:1-31 10. The Church in a Day of Ruin Timothy 2 1. The Church Prophetically Announced Matthew 16:1-18;Matthew 18:15-20 No Scripture perhaps will give us so deep a sense of the value of the Church to the heart of Christ as that which tells us "Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it." He did not simply give up His kingdom and throne with all His earthly rights and glories; He gave Himself. If, then, Christ loved the Church with love so great, we may well be at some pains to inquire: what is the Church, of whom is it composed, and why is it so precious in His sight? What are its privileges, its responsibilities, and what is its glorious destiny?

Moreover, the Church is Christ's chief interest on earth-the subject of all God's present dealings. During the period between the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the coming of Christ at the rapture, God is not dealing directly with the world. whether Jew or Gentile; He is taking a people out of the world to form the Church for Heaven. Without Scriptural thoughts as to the truth of the great mystery concerning Christ and the Church, we shall not be able intelligently to enjoy Christian fellowship, take up the service of the Lord, or even fulfil the ordinary duties of life, for when we come to examine the Epistles we shall find that everything in Christianity takes its character from Christ and the Church. At the outset it may be well to define what we mean when we use the word "church." It is used in so many different connections that it has become an exceedingly ambiguous term. However, m the original there is no such ambiguity. The Greek word is used one hundred and fifty times in the New Testament. In three instances it is correctly translated "assembly," but in every other instance by this unfortunate word "church." In Tyndale's translation of the New Testament, the basis of the Authorized Version, the Greek word is rightly translated by the word "congregation"; but in our Authorized Version of 1611, King James, for political reasons, insisted that the ecclesiastical word "church" should be used, and the Revised Version has unfortunately retained the word. In the New Translation by the late J. N. Darby the word "assembly" is used, and beyond all question this is the simple and proper translation. The context must decide of whom the assembly is composed, but this occasions no real difficulty, for in the New Testament, with the exception of two passages, the word invariably refers to the Assembly of God. It may be well to mention that both these exceptions occur in the Acts of the

Apostles. In Chapter 7:38 the word "church" is used in reference to Israel. It should be translated "assembly," and of course refers to the congregation of Israel in the wilderness, and has no reference to the Assembly of God in the New Testament. The other occurrence is in Acts 19:1-41, where the word "assembly" is used three times, and refers, as the context shows, to an assembly of heathen people. In using, then, the word "church," it must be always understood to mean an assembly of people, and the assembly of which we speak is the Assembly of God. With these preliminary remarks we may now turn to Matthew 16:1-28. In this important passage we have the first revelation concerning the Church. The Person of Christ is presented as the test of the Jewish system about to pass away and as the foundation of the new structure that Christ was about to build-His Assembly, the Church. A great crisis had been reached in the path of the Lord. The most perfect witness to the Messiah had been rendered in the midst of Israel. Signs had been given, miracles had been performed, and prophecies had been accomplished. The highest moral perfection, in word and life, had been exhibited before men, accompanied by love, grace, and sympathy. that abounded to all, without distinction or limit. But all was in vain. The unbelief, the scorn, the deadly hostility of the leaders increased with every fresh display of grace. At length, all is brought to an issue by the great test question, "Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am?" Some said "John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets" (vs. 13, 14) . The reply shows that, in spite of a perfect testimony, men could only advance idle opinions and speculations which left them in hopeless uncertainty. The fact that men are content to speculate about Christ, and willing to remain in uncertainty, is a solemn proof that they have no sense of need on the one hand and no faith on the other. With a sense of need, they would have had discernment, and with faith, they would have obtained certainty. Moreover, with all their speculations, never once did they approach the truth. This demonstrates the utter incapacity of man, as such, to discern the glory of Christ, even under the most favourable circumstances and in the presence of the Son of God Himself. In the opening verses of the chapter, this unbelief comes to a head. The Pharisees and the Sadducees, who cordially hated one another, are united in their still greater hatred of Christ. The ritualists and the rationalists of the day join hands to tempt the Son of God, and both reveal their utter blindness to the glory of His Person by asking for a sign from heaven (v. 1). As one has well said, "Such is unbelief, that it can go into the presence of the full manifestation of God, can gaze at a light brighter than the sun at noonday. and then and there ask God to give a candle." Nothing could bring out more clearly their utter rejection of Christ than this request for a sign. They had rejected Christ and, now, after long patience, are rejected by Christ. They are a wicked and adulterous generation for whom there is only one sign-the sign of Jonah, speaking of imminent judgment. The Lord exposed their character, pronounced their doom, and left them and departed (v. 4). Solemn moment for Israel! The Lord of glory was there; the God that made heaven and earth was in their midst full of grace and truth, but the darkness comprehended Him not. He commenced His ministry of love and grace by coming and dwelling in the land of Nepthalim, so that it could be said, "The people which sat in darkness saw great light and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up." But darkness could not comprehend the light; evil spurned His goodness, and hatred flung back His love. Thus we read those sad, solemn words, "He left them and departed." He left them in the darkness and under the shadow of death. But does the wickedness of man exhaust the grace of God? Never! On the contrary it becomes the occasion of unfolding the deeper counsels of His heart and yet greater purposes of grace. The rejection of Israel made way for the revelation of the Church. The

moment had come when the first intimation of this great secret, until now hidden in God, should be given. The question that had tested all men was then pressed home upon the disciples, "Whom say ye that I am?" (v. 15). At once Simon Peter replied, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. " How different was this reply from the idle opinions of men. Peter's faith may indeed have been weak-for the Lord had just said, "O ye of little faith" but it was a living faith, a faith that discerned the glory of the Person of Christ and confessed Him with the utmost certainty.

Immediately following this confession we have the revelation of the Church. The Lord lifts the veil that throughout the ages had concealed the eternal counsels of God and in one brief sentence shows that the glory of His Person as the Son of God involves depths far beyond an earthly dominion, however glorious.

"Blessed art thou," replied the Lord to Simon Barjona, "for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven. and I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this Rock I will build My Church; and the gates of hades shall not prevail against it" (vs. 17, 18). Here, then, we have a twofold revelation. First the revelation by the Father. Flesh and blood, as we have seen, could not discern the glory of the Messiah. Only by a revelation from the Father in Heaven was it possible for a man on earth to discern that Christ was the Son of the living God-a title which involves that the Son is One in whom is life and life-giving power. It has been well said that as the Son of the living God, "He inherits that power of life in God which nothing can overcome or destroy." But there immediately follows a second revelation-a revelation by the Son-for the Lord says, "And I say also unto thee." The Father had revealed the glory of the Son to Simon Peter, and based on the confession that follows this revelation, the Son also reveals to Peter the great secret, never before made known to man, that upon this rock the Lord was going to build an entirely new structure which He calls "My Assembly." Here, then, we have the foundation of the Church. It is raised on a solid and Divine foundation-the Person of the Son of the living God.

Here indeed are truths that flesh and blood could not reveal. When God is communicating the law, Moses and the angels are equal to the occasion; but when it is the glory of the Son, and God's counsels as to the Church, the Revelation must, in the first place, come from the Father and the Son. We pass into a region where flesh and blood, as such, can neither communicate nor receive.

Moreover, we see the purpose of the Church. It is brought into existence for the glory and delight of Christ. We learn at the outset that the Church is Christ's. He can say it is "My Assembly." The first great thought is, not that Christ is for the Church, but that the Church is for Christ. The bride in the Song of Songs, thinking first of her own need, exclaims, "My Beloved is mine"; but at last he is brought to view all from the standpoint of the Bridegroom, and then, with great delight, she can say, "I am my Beloved's, and His desire is toward me." Here, too, in this first great revelation of the Church, all is viewed from Christ as the centre. The Father begins with His glory, and the Church is viewed as for Him-His Assembly.

Furthermore, we learn something of the structure of the Church. It is to be built of living stones, Peter being viewed as one of the stones. On that eventful day when Andrew went forth and found his own brother Simon and "brought him to Jesus," the Lord announced that Simon should wear a new name, that he should be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, a stone. Christ as the Son of the living God was the Rock on which the Church is built; Peter was a stone, deriving his life from Christ, and destined to be built into this new Structure.

We are further instructed as to the building of the Church. At the time of this revelation the Church was yet future, for, says the Lord, "I will build." Moreover, the work would be wholly Christ's, and therefore wholly perfect for the Lord says, "I will build." No wood, hay, and stubble would be built into Christ's Assembly -none but living stones would have a place in Christ's Building.

Hence the Lord can make this further great statement that against His Church "the gates of hades shall not prevail." This speaks of the stability of the Church. The gates of hades signify the power of death wielded by Satan. Through sin man has passed under the dominion of death, a terrific power that lays man's glory in the dust. But in the very world where nothing has withstood the power of death, the Lord foretells that at last He will establish His Church over which the gates of hades will have no power; and this will be brought to pass because it is based upon the Son of the living God. All else in this world has been based upon Adam-a dying man- and the sons of dying men. But nothing can overcome the power of life in God, whether that life be in God, in Christ, or in those to whom He communicates the life. Christ's Assembly is composed of living stones, not dying men. It is built upon Christ, the One who inherits a life that nothing can destroy, and built of stones that possess this life and therefore is superior to all the power of death. The Son of the living God is the everlasting foundation of the Church. Hence there can be no true apprehension of the Church until the glory of the Son is seen and confessed, and the more we apprehend His glory the more we shall appreciate the unique character of the Church. In this introductory passage we have the revelation of the Church; we are instructed as to the foundation on which the Church is built, the purpose for which it is built, the character of those who compose the Building, the One who builds and the eternal stability of this new and divine Structure.

There is no word as yet of the Body of Christ or the Bride of Christ. Nothing is said of the exaltation of Christ or the coming of the Spirit. All those great truths so vital to the formation of the Church will be unfolded in due time, but in this first communication life is the great thought: life in the living God, life in the Son, and life communicated to those who compose the Church: life against which the power of death cannot prevail. In due time Peter will unfold to us further and precious truths concerning Christ's Assembly. He will tell us how the Building grows, as the living stones are drawn to Christ the Living Stone, and for what great end we are built up a spiritual House. John, too, from his island prison will pass on to us a vision of the Assembly when the last stone has been added and the Building is displayed in glory as the New Jerusalem. Then, at last, it will be seen that though fashioned in time, Christ's Church is destined for eternity, and though built upon earth, it will be displayed in Heaven.

There is one other passage in Matthew in which the Lord refers to the Assembly. In Matthew 18:15-20 we learn two truths of immense importance to the Assembly. First the Lord instructs us how evil can be excluded from the Assembly and second, how His presence can be secured in the Assembly. The Assembly is passing through an evil world, and while on earth, the flesh remains in those who compose the Assembly; hence on earth offences will come, and even brother may trespass against brother. But the Lord instructs us how to deal with the offender. If he refuses to hear the Assembly, it may even lead to his sin being bound upon him and his exclusion from the company of the Lord's people on earth; and if he repent, his sin can be loosed from him by his reception once again among the Lord's people. This solemn action on earth of binding and loosing-if rightly taken-is ratified in Heaven. In the Epistles to the Corinthians we see a solemn example of both actions. But many difficulties will arise which we nave neither wisdom nor power

in ourselves to meet. But we have a resource; we can turn to the Father in prayer, and the Lord assures us, "That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in Heaven." Here we have two statements at first sight so surprising that we may well ask, how can these things be? How can it be that acts on earth will be ratified in Heaven, and that requests on earth shall be granted by Heaven? What is it that makes such things possible? One thing alone, the presence of the Lord in the midst of His people when gathered to His Name. "For," says the Lord, "where two or three are gathered together unto My Name, there am I in the midst of them." He is present to confirm their acts. He is present to guide and answer their prayers . His presence, however, is only promised to two or three gathered unto His Name. What do these words signify? First the promise is given to "two or three," words which, of course, applied to the brightest day of the Church's history, but adapt themselves so blessedly for a day of weakness when the numbers gathered unto His Name in any given place may be reduced to the smallest possible number.

Then the "two or three do not simply come together; they are "gathered" together. This involves a power that gathers. There is something that draws them together; what is it? It is the apprehension of what His Name sets forth, for we gather unto His Name, not "in His Name," as we have in our version, which would simply mean that we gather by His authority. His name expresses all that He is, and it is our mutual apprehension of Him in the glory of His Person that draws us together. We are drawn together by what we have found in Him. He is the powerful and all-sufficient bond. There may be great differences in age, social position, education, nationality, intelligence. spiritual growth, and gift, but none of these things form the bond of the Assembly. The Assembly is not a meeting of young people, or of old saints, or of like-minded people, but of a people who are drawn together by what they have discovered in Christ as set forth in His Name. The Assembly has no other bond, refuses all other bonds, and, gathering together thus, the Lord promises to be in the midst, even if it be but two or three who are thus gathered.

We do not gather to Himself, but to his Name. The passage distinguishes between Himself and His Name. Gathering to His name supposes His absence, but secures His presence. In such a gathering He is truly present, not indeed bodily, but in spirit. When on earth He could speak of Himself as the Son of Man which is in Heaven; bodily upon earth, but in spirit in Heaven. Now He is the Son of Man in Heaven, but in spirit on earth in the midst of His people when gathered together unto His Name. He is present to give sanction to the process of discipline and to give effect to the prayers of His people.

2. The Church in Actual Existence Acts 1:1-26, Acts 2:1-47, Acts 3:1-26, Acts 4:1-37, Acts 5:1-42, Acts 6:1-15, Acts 7:1-70, Acts 8:1-40, Acts 9:1-43 In tracing God's thoughts of the Church, as unfolded in His Word, we shall find the early chapters of the Acts carry us a stage in advance of Matthew 16:1-28. There the Church is prophetically announced. Here it is formed and seen in actual existence. But it is not yet the subject of the Spirit's teaching; for this the moment had not yet come, nor was the man yet called who was to be the chosen vessel to unfold the mystery of Christ and the Church. The death of Christ is the basis of all blessing for men, whether for the saints of Old Testament days, for those who compose the Church, or for restored Israel in the age to come. But the formation of the Church awaited two other events of immense import. The risen Christ must ascend as a Man into the glory, and the Holy Spirit-a Divine Person-must come to earth. The Man in the glory and the Holy Spirit abiding on earth are the two great distinguishing

facts of the Christian period. They had no existence in the ages that are past, and they will not mark the ages that are to come; they give the entire character to the present moment. In Acts 1:1-26 we see the fulfilment of the first great event. Here the disciples receive the last directions from the risen Lord, and "while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight." Christ as a Man was received up into the glory. Of course, in so speaking we must never forget that He is a Divine Person "over all, God blessed for ever." But still it is as Man He ascended to Heaven, and as the Son of Man He was seen in Heaven by the martyr, Stephen. In the second chapter of the Acts we get the fulfilment of the second great event. The Holy Ghost was received on earth according to that word in John 7:39, which connects His coming with the glory of Christ. The disciples were "all together in one place" waiting, according to the Lord's word, for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. While they waited, the Holy Spirit came "from Heaven" and filled all the house where they were sitting; and not only so, but each individual was filled with the Holy Spirit. Thus by one Spirit they were "all baptized into one Body" (1 Corinthians 12:13). Here, then, the "one Body" became an actual fact: that Body of which Christ is the Head in Heaven, and believers, the members on earth. The fact was not yet revealed, and could hardly be, as the Body is composed of Jewish and Gentile believers and therefore the revelation of the truth was not given until the Gentile believers had been baptized into the Body by the Holy Spirit. (See Acts 10:1-48; Acts 11:16.)

Following upon the baptism of the Spirit, a great number of Jews and proselytes were convicted, believed in Christ, were baptized, received the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Further, we read, "the same day there were added about three thousand souls" (v. 41). Then the last verse of the chapter tells us who added them and to what they were added. It was the Lord Himself who added them, and it was to the Church they were added. For the first time we are permitted to see the Lord forming His Church according to His own prophetic announcement in Matthew 16:1-28. "I will build My Church." The closing words of the verse, "such as should be saved," do not imply that they were unbelievers or that they were added in order to be saved. The nation, having rejected Christ, was going on to judgment, but those who believed and were baptized would be saved from that judgment, and such the Lord added to the Church. They were added to the Lord before 'hey were added to the Church. To insist upon this is of the greatest importance, because Catholicism, and those who follow Catholicism, attach salvation to being of the Church, instead of making the Church the Assembly of those who are saved. Only believers in the beginning of the chapter were formed into he Church by the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and only believers at the end of the chapter were added to the Church by the Lord.

Here, then, the Church is seen in actual existence. "All that believed were together" (v. 44). We thus see the fulfilment of that word spoken by Caiaphas concerning Christ when he said, "He should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad." It has been truly said, "There were indeed children of God before this moment, but they were scattered abroad, they were isolated. Christ by His death was to gather them together, not merely to save them, so that they might be together in Heaven (since they were children of God, that was already done), but He was to gather them together in one." This was something entirely new upon the earth. It was no new thing for children of God to exist on the earth. It was no new thing that such were journeying on to Heaven. That was true in Enoch's day, and Job's day, and throughout the days of old, however dimly it was known. But that the children of God should be gathered together in one

was an entirely new thing. And this is the truth that the people of God are still so slow to apprehend. We think of ourselves as isolated saints, as if we lived before the cross. Being saved, we are apt to think that it is left to us, according to the best of our ability, to choose what "church" we shall join or whether we shall join any at all. But in this thought we fail to see that already, if we have come to the Lord, He has added us to the Church, and thus there can be no question of remaining in isolation on the one hand, or of joining a church on the other. The very thought of joining "a" church betrays ignorance of the truth of "the" Church.

Moreover, not only were the saints gathered together in one, but being gathered together, God makes ample provision that they might continue together in a visible unity.

First, we have the apostles' teaching, by which the saints were led into all the truth of God and instructed in the mind of God as to their pathway on earth. This instruction, given orally at first, was later on secured to the saints for all time in the inspired Epistles.

Second, flowing from the apostles' teaching, we have the apostles' fellowship. This, as we know, is the fellowship into which all Christians are called-the fellowship of God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. The Son of God is the centre and object of this fellowship.

Third, the apostles fellowship leads to the breaking of bread, the formal and highest expression of fellowship, that which calls to remembrance the death of Christ by which the children of God have been entirely separated from the world and gathered together in one.

Last, prayer, by which, as saints, we are kept in the attitude of dependence upon God, recognizing that His grace is available for us, and that we constantly need to come boldly to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Regretfully, God's provision has been almost wholly neglected, and hence the divided and scattered condition of God's people. Christendom has largely set aside the apostles' doctrine by its own tradition; has formed "fellowships" around gifted men, or particular views, instead of the Son of God; has perverted the breaking of bread from a supper of remembrance to a ceremonial means of grace; and has turned prayer into mere formality. However, in the early days of the Acts, the believers 'continued steadfastly" in the apostles' doctrine, and fellowship, and breaking of bread, and prayer; and as long as they so continued they remained together in a visible unity.

We have thus seen in the second chapter of the Acts how the Lord Himself builds His Church with living stones upon the Rock. But all this takes place on earth; there is as yet no hint of the heavenly character of the Assembly or of its glorious destiny in the counsels of God. There is not a word so far of the union of the Body on earth with the Head in Heaven. "Union" is still a secret to be unfolded in due time, but what is manifested in these early chapters of the Acts is "unity." Not necessarily a material unity, but a moral unity, marked by gladness and singleness of heart. There remained one event to be fulfilled before the full heavenly character and calling of the Church could be revealed. Israel's cup of guilt must be filled to the brim. Already the nation had rejected and crucified their Messiah; but now the Holy Spirit had come, with the last offer to the guilty nation. Will they resist the Spirit as they had already rejected the Messiah? When the Lord ascended, as recorded in Acts 1:1-26, the disciples "looked steadfastly toward Heaven as He went up." Immediately two angels stood by them, which said, "Why stand ye gazing up into Heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into Heaven, shall so come in like manner." The

angels turn their gaze from Heaven, whence Christ had gone, toward the earth to which He will come. At first we might wonder at this. Surely it was a right thing to look up to Heaven where Christ is? Yes, in due season it will be right, but the moment had not yet come to look up. And as we listen to Peter preaching to the nation, we can understand why the disciples' thoughts were to linger for a while on earth. For, says Peter to the guilty nation, "Repent ye, therefore, and be converted. that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you" (Acts 3:19-20). This was the final message in grace to the guilty nation, proclaimed by the Holy Spirit come down from the ascended Christ. If they will repent, Jesus will come back to earth. In result they utterly refuse this testimony of the Holy Spirit. They had been the betrayers and murderers of their own Messiah. The Holy Spirit (not having taken a body) they could not murder, but they can murder the man that is filled with the Holy Spirit, and this they do by stoning the witness, Stephen. The rejection by the nation of this final offer of grace brings about an entire change in the dispensation. Thereafter it is all over with them, and the centre of all God's dealings passes from earth to Heaven. In harmony with this change Stephen, being filled with the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into Heaven, and no angel stands by to inquire why he looks up. God's time has come for His people to Look away from earth to Heaven. And not only he looks up, but his happy spirit is received up. The first of the long line of martyrs is received into Heaven. Now God's people no longer belong to earth from which Christ has been rejected, but to Heaven where Christ has been received. Heaven is their home, and Christ is there to receive them into that home. If the world will not have Christ, it is no place for His people, and if Heaven has received Christ, then a new place is opened for His people, and into that new place He receives them.

Acts 7:1-60 is a great turning-point in the ways of God. From the moment the testimony of Stephen is rejected, the great characteristics of the dispensation come prominently to the fore. In the closing scene of this chapter, everyone and everything stands revealed according to the true character of the Christian dispensation. The guilty nation of Israel is seen in its absolute rejection of Christ and its inveterate resistance to the Holy Spirit. The world is seen in its true character as the rejecter of Christ and the persecutor of His saints. Heaven is seen flung open to disclose Christ in the glory, for the reception of the saints. Christ is seen as the Man in the glory supporting His tried saints on earth and receiving them to Heaven as they fall asleep. The Holy Spirit is seen as a Divine Person on earth, filling a man on earth and leading him to look up steadfastly to Christ in Heaven. And lastly, this Spirit-filled saint is presented as a man on earth drawing all his resources from the Man in the glory, and in so doing becoming changed into His likeness from glory to glory, in such fashion that, like his Master, he prays for his murderers and commits his spirit to the Lord. So that as a man on earth is supported by the Man in the glory, the Man in the glory is represented by a man on earth. Having fought the fight and finished his course, Stephen's happy spirit departs to be with Christ, while his poor battered body falls asleep to await a glorious resurrection.

Ever since the stoning of Stephen, the world has been true to its character. It rejected Christ then; it persecuted the saints then; it has done so ever since in different measures and degrees. It may be religious-it was so then, and it is so now-but religion does not change its character. Indeed, the greater the world's profession of religion, the more intense its hatred and the more relentless its persecution of the saints. Let history bear witness to its unchanging hostility to Christ and His people. Heaven, too, has not changed its attitude to God's people. It was open then; it is open still;

and through that open door we can still look into the glory where Jesus is, and the love of Christ still streams down upon His saints. Then truly with Christ there is no change. We can look up and say, 'Thou remainest" and "Thou art the same." All the grace and power and wisdom of the Man in the glory are still as available for the support of His people as when Stephen was so blessedly sustained in his martyrdom. With the Holy Spirit, too, there is no change. He came from Christ in the glory to lead us to Christ in the glory. And this is still the way He takes. But how believers have hanged! How little we have remained true to our character as saints. How much we have grieved the Spirit, and thus, instead of looking steadfastly to Heaven, we have looked to earth. We have become earthly, if not worldly. Consequently, the support of the Lord has been little received and the power of the Spirit but little manifested, so that we have been but poor representatives of the Man in the glory. But in spite of all failure, the picture in Acts 7:1-60 remains in all its excellent beauty to recall our hearts to the true character of the dispensation. But it does more; it prepares the way for the ministry of Paul with its rich unfolding of the Church is the one Body with Christ, the risen Head, in Heaven. In the history of Stephen we surely learn that the disciples of the risen Christ belong to Heaven. But in the story of Paul's conversion in Acts 9:1-43, we learn, not only that the saints belong to Heaven, but that the saints on earth are united to Christ in Heaven. As Saul journeyed on his way to Damascus "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord," he was struck to the ground by a light from Heaven and heard the voice of Christ From the glory saying unto him Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" The voice did not say, "Mine," nor even "us," but "Me." Mine would imply a company of people that belong to Christ; true indeed, but not all the truth. "Us" would imply a company of people associated with Christ; also true, but not the full truth. "Me" involves a company of people in union with Christ, and in such intimate fashion that to touch them is to touch Christ. The martyrdom of Stephen and the persecution that follows presents the world in its true character as a persecutor of the saints; but at the conversion of Saul we learn the further truth that in persecuting the saints the world is persecuting Christ. The Church is one with Christ in Heaven, and He is persecuted in His members. This, as it has been said, is "the strongest expression of our union with Him-that He considers the feeblest member of His Body as part of Himself." In Acts 2:1-47 and Acts 4:1-37 the saints were gathered together with "one heart" and "one soul" presenting a beautiful expression of unity; but here is disclosed the deeper truth of their intimate union with Christ, their exalted Head in Heaven, and with one another as members of His Body on earth.

Israel, having crucified the Messiah, rejected Christ in the glory, and resisted the Holy Spirit on earth, is entirely set aside for the time being, while the Church, formed on earth but destined for glory, becomes the witness for God in the world. Paul was the chosen vessel to unfold by Divine teaching in his Epistles the great truths concerning Christ and the Church.

3. The Church in the Counsels of God Ephesians 1:1-23,Ephesians 2:1-10 In Matthew 16:1-28 we have the prophetic announcement of the Church by the Lord Himself; in the Acts we have the historical account of the formation of the Church through the ministry of the apostles; and in the Epistles, the Divine teaching as to the Church by the Holy Spirit. The Epistle to the Ephesians presents this teaching in its greatest fullness.

Chapter 1 presents God's counsels in regard to Christ and the Church. We are carried back before the foundation of the world to trace the source of all our blessings in God's eternal purpose: we are transported to the fullness of times, there to see the inheritance of glory when all God's counsels

will be fulfilled. In Ephesians 2:1-10 we have God's work in us, in view of His counsels for us, whereby He quickens dead souls, raises them up together with Christ, and seats them in Christ in the heavenlies. In Ephesians 2:11-22 we have God's ways with us in time to bring about His counsels for us in eternity. There is what God has purposed for us, what God works in us, and what God does with us. He works in us that we might be quickened together with Christ; He works with us that we might be Drought together in one Body, fitly framed together into a holy Temple in the Lord, and builded together for an Habitation of God through the Spirit.

We can, however, readily understand that the Epistle must of necessity commence with unfolding the purpose of God; for unless we know His purposes for eternity, we shall not understand His ways in time. We might well be puzzled by the way a parent trains his child until we learn the parent's ultimate purpose for the child. Confining then our thoughts to the early part of the Epistle (Ephesians 2:1-10), we see the Church presented in connection with the counsels and work of God. Man's work and man's responsibilities have no place in this passage. All is counselled by God, and all is carried out by God: and, being of God, all is perfect.

Verses 3-7 unfold the counsels of God for His saints individually-those who compose the Church. In this great passage we see the character of our blessings, the source of our blessings, the end God has in view, and the means by which that end is reached. As to the character of our blessings, it is important to remember that they are spiritual, and heavenly, and in Christ, for we are so prone to look for blessings that are material, and earthly, and in connection with Adam. The realization of the true character of our blessings would have an immense effect upon our testimony. What is the aim of the great mass of so-called ministry today? Is it not, in the main, to make believers moral rather than spiritual, to improve their earthly position rather than call them out of the world for Heaven, and to improve the first man rather than lead into the new position in Christ? God forms our character and testimony by instructing us in the true character of our blessings and leading us into the enjoyment of them. As to the source of all our blessings we read, "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world." All our blessings have their source in the counsels of the Father's heart. We discover that His heart was set upon us before the foundation of the world. And He delights that we should know it; and loving the Father, we count it one of our choicest privileges that He should have revealed to us the secrets of His heart. Chosen in Him before the foundation of the world involves a choice that is independent of the scene of creation. Hence God's purpose for us cannot depend upon anything that we have done or can do. We find ourselves in a world of sorrow and trial, of opposition and persecution, but God's purpose cannot be altered by anything we are called to pass through in time. The devil would attempt to use the difficulties of the way to raise in our hearts distrust of God and to call in question the reality of His love. But here we are permitted to see that the love of the Father is behind all, and that, before the foundation of the world, He set His love upon us in view of our eternal blessing when the world shall be no more. How this steadies the soul in its journey through the world, for nothing that takes place in the ways of God in time can touch the counsels of love that were settled in eternity and for eternity.

Moreover, we are not only carried back before the foundation of the world to find the source of all our blessing in the heart of God, but we are carried on in spirit to view the end of all God's counsels in glory. Thus we learn that God had purposed to have the saints before Him in a condition that is suited to Him: "holy and without blame before Him in love" -holy in character,

without blame in conduct, and in love as to nature. Nothing less would suit the heart of God; for if God is to have a people before Him in a condition suited to Him, it must be in a condition in which they are like Him. Only that which is like God is suited to God. God is holy in character, blameless in all His ways, and love in His nature. And in this condition He has purposed to have us so that He can delight in us and we can delight in Him. Nothing less would suit His heart, and nothing less would make us happy in His presence. No question as to character, or conduct, or nature will ever be raised in that scene to mar our joy in God or His satisfaction in us. And what will be accomplished in its fullness then is wrought in our souls by the Spirit now, if, in the power of the Spirit, we shall seek to. answer down here to what we shall be in perfection up there.

Furthermore, not only are we chosen to be in a condition suited to God, but we are predestined to enjoy the relationship of sons before the Father. Angels, doubtless, will be before God in a condition suited to God, but they are there in the position of servants. We are brought into the relationship of sons. This is the special privilege to which we are predestined according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace.

Moreover, in view of the accomplishment of God’s purpose, we must be redeemed and have the forgiveness of sins through the blood of Christ, according to the riches of His grace. The apostle has connected predestination with "the glory of His grace", now he connects redemption with "the riches of His grace." Our great need is met by the riches of His grace, but the glory of His grace does more; it takes us into favour and gives us the place of sons. Meeting the prodigal’s need shows how rich were the resources of grace in the Father’s home; but giving him the place of son displayed the glory of the grace in the Father’s heart. In the Epistle to the Romans the death of Christ is fully developed in meeting all our responsibilities, and thus there the apostle exclaims, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God." In Ephesians the apostle passes beyond our responsibilities to unfold our privileges; hence we have not only the riches of His grace, but the glory of His grace.

Having then, m the first seven verses, unfolded the counsels of the Father’s heart concerning His people, the apostle passes on to fresh wonders. He discloses to us the Father’s secret will concerning Christ. He has satisfied our hearts by unfolding the purposes of love, He has given the conscience rest by the work of redemption, and thus set free, we are able to enter into God’s thoughts concerning Christ and the Church.

God would have us to know the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself for the administration of the fullness of times. What does this word "mystery" mean? Is it something that we cannot understand, or that is mysterious or puzzling? Far from it. In Scripture a mystery is a secret that cannot possibly be known until revealed by God, and when revealed can only be known by the initiated. This mystery is according to His good pleasure; it is a secret that delights His heart, for it concerns Christ. Do we say that we are not interested in mysteries, that we leave these deep things to others ! Surely not, for this would mean that we are content to know what God has in His heart for us, without any concern as to what God has in His heart for Christ.

Here the mystery has reference to the "fullness of times" when God will have everything administered according to His mind: when everything that God has instituted at other times, and which has so utterly failed in the hands of men, will be administered in all its fullness under Christ.

Government and priesthood and royalty were instituted by God in other days, only to break down because committed to man's responsibility. But the time is coming when they will all be seen in perfection and fullness. This will be brought about by heading up all things in Christ, both the things which are in Heaven and which are on earth. At present Christ is hidden; but when He comes forth in glory, all the confusion, the sorrow and disorder of this world will be past. Satan's reign will be ended, the time of Israel's blindness will be over, the godless rule of the Gentile nations will be closed, the groan of creation will be hushed, and the curse will be removed. All will be brought about, not by the spread of the Gospel, as some vainly imagine, or by anything that man can accomplish, but by Christ alone. When He sets up His throne-when He reigns-all will be administered to the good pleasure of God. The Old Testament abundantly foretells ''the sufferings of Christ and the glories that should follow," which glories, though they reach to the utmost bounds of earth, are still earthly and not heavenly. This is no secret or mystery; on the contrary the prophets are full of glowing descriptions of the earthly Kingdom. when, however, we come to the New Testament, God unfolds to us the great secret, that Christ's dominion will stretch immeasurably beyond the limits of earth; that as a Man, Christ will have dominion not only "from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth," but over the whole vast universe of God to the utmost bounds of creation; that He should be set far above all principality and power and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; yea, more, that all things in Heaven and earth will be united under Christ as Head.

God has abounded to us in all wisdom and intelligence in thus making known to us not only His purpose for His people, but the secrets of His heart for Christ; not only His purpose for earth, but His secrets concerning the whole universe. The Heavens are now severed from the earth, but it will not always be so. God has purposed to unite Heaven and earth under Christ as Man. This is the mystery of His will, but even so it is not the whole mystery. For the mystery concerns, "Christ and the Church" (Ephesians 5:32). Not Christ alone, nor the Church alone, but Christ and the Church. This leads us on to the most amazing part of the mystery; that in the day of His universal dominion, Christ will have a vast company of people-saved from the wreck and ruin of this fallen world-made like to Himself as the result of His own work, united to Him by the Holy Spirit, to share with Him in all the glory of His universal sway as His Body and His Bride. The remaining portion of this chapter brings before us this further truth. The apostle continues "in whom also we have obtained an inheritance." In verses 11 and 12 he speaks of the Jewish believers, in verse 13, of the Gentile believers, and in verse 14, in speaking of "our inheritance" he refers to both Jewish and Gentile believers together.

Thus, to use the words of another, this great mystery is "Christ and the Church united in heavenly blessedness and dominion over everything that God has made."

Christ will reign over Israel, over the Gentiles, over the whole universe, but never is it said that He will reign over the Church. Christ, indeed, will ever be supreme, but to the praise of His glory the Church will reign with Him. This is made more abundantly plain by the apostle's prayer which closes the chapter. Having unfolded the hope of the calling in verses 3-7, and the inheritance in verses 8-14, the apostle now prays that we may know these things, and moreover that we may know the greatness of the power to us that will bring these glorious truths to fruition. This power has been set forth in raising Christ from the dead and setting Him "above all" and putting "all things under His feet." But while it is given to Christ as Man to be Head over all, He is Head to the Church

which is His Body, the fullness of Him that filleth all things. Here the Church is viewed as the Body of Christ, not in the ways of God on earth, but according to the counsels of God in glory. In the beginning of the chapter we nave the unfolding of the counsels of God for the individuals who compose the Church in the end of the chapter, the counsels of God for the Church, as a whole, under the figure of a body. We are taken on to a time when the Body, complete in glory, will be united to the Head in His dominion over all things.

Adam and Eve furnish a type of Christ and the Church. Eve was not directly set in dominion over this lower world, but Adam was. It is true God said unto them "Be fruitful . . . and have dominion," but actually Adam was set in dominion before Eve was formed. The animal creation was brought to Adam to name; he was in relation with all as head over all, and by association with Adam, Eve shared in his dominion. So the Church by association with Christ, will share in His universal dominion over all creation. And just as Eve was said to be a helpmeet for Adam-his counterpart-so the Church is said to be the fullness of Him that filleth all in all. Apart from the Church, Christ would lack His fullness. As one has said, "As Son of God, He, of course, requires nothing to complete His glory; but as Man He does. He would no more be complete in His resurrection glory without the Church than Adam would have been without Eve."

4. The Church in the Ways of God Ephesians 2:11-22 In the first part of the Epistle to the Ephesians (Ephesians 1:1-23 and Ephesians 2:1-10) the Church is presented in relation to Christ in glory, according to the counsels of God. This prepares the way for a very different view of the Church-its formation and testimony on earth according to the ways of God.

There is a vast difference between the counsels of God for glory and the ways of God on earth. Comprehending this distinction, we shall see that not only has the Church a glorious destiny as united to Christ in Heaven, according to the eternal purpose of God, but that it also has an existence on earth, and a great place in the ways of God here below. It is this aspect of the Church that comes before us in Ephesians 2:11-22. In order that we may understand this very important aspect of the Church, the apostle reminds us of the distinct position held by Israel in the times before the cross. At that time there existed a very sharp distinction between Jew and Gentile. In the ways of God on earth the Jew enjoyed a place of privilege to which the Gentile was an entire stranger. Israel formed an earthly commonwealth with earthly promises and earthly hopes. They were in outward relationship with God. Their religious worship, their political organization, their daily pursuits, their domestic affairs, all, from the highest act of worship to the smallest detail of life, was regulated by the ordinances of God. This was an immense privilege in which the Gentiles, as such, had no part. It was not that the Jews were any better than the Gentiles, for, in the sight of God, the great mass of the Jews were as bad as the Gentiles, and some even worse; and on the other hand, there were individual Gentiles who were truly converted men, such, for instance, as Job. But in the ways of God upon earth, He separated Israel from the Gentiles and gave them a place of special outward privilege; or even if unconverted (as indeed was the case with the mass) it was an immense privilege to have all their affairs regulated according to the perfect wisdom of God. The Gentiles had no such position in the world. They enjoyed no public recognition by God. Their affairs were not regulated by the ordinances of God. And the very ordinances that regulated the life of the Jew, sternly kept Jew and Gentile apart.

Thus the Jew had a place on earth of outward nearness to God, while the Gentile was outwardly far off with no recognized connection with God in the world. But Israel entirely failed to answer to their privileges. They turned from Jehovah to idols. The commandments and ordinances of God, which gave them their unique position, they wholly disregarded. Finally, they crucified their Messiah and resisted the Holy Spirit. As a result they have, for the time being, lost their special place of privilege on the earth, have been dispossessed of their land and scattered among the nations. This setting aside of Israel prepares the way for the marvellous change that has taken place in the ways of God on earth. The vivid glimpse into the past given by the Spirit of God in verses 11 and 12 only makes the contrast more striking, for, following upon the rejection of Israel, God, in the pursuit of His ways, has brought to light the Church and thus set up an entirely new circle of blessing, wholly outside the Jewish and Gentile circles. This new departure becomes the occasion of the grace of God flowing out in a very special way to the Gentile. The call goes out to the Gentile; not, indeed, that the Jew is excluded from the new circle of blessing, for, as we shall see, the Church is composed of believers from among both Jews and Gentiles. But if the Gentile is to be brought into the inestimable privileges and blessings of the new circle-if the Gentile is to have part in the Church-it must be on a righteous ground. Hence the cross is at once brought in (v. 13). The cross has already been alluded to in Ephesians 1:1-23 in connection with the fulfilment of the counsels of God. Here in Ephesians 2:1-22 the cross is referred to in connection with the ways of God on earth. By the blood of Christ sinners of the Gentiles are made nigh to God, being brought from the place of distance in which sin had put them, into a place of nearness. Not a mere outward nearness, by means of ordinances and ceremonies, but a vital nearness that is only fully expressed in Christ Himself, risen from the dead and appearing before the face of God for us. Thus it is said, "In Christ Jesus ye . . . are made nigh by the blood of Christ." Our sins put us afar off, but not only does the precious blood wash away our sins, it does more, infinitely more-it makes us nigh. The blood of Christ declares the enormity of the sin which demanded such a price, proclaims the holiness of God that could be satisfied with no less a price, and reveals the infinite love that could pay the price. But this, however necessary for the formation of the Church, does not in itself constitute the Church. The Church is not simply a number of individuals "made nigh," for this will be true of every blood-bought saint of every age. There is more needed; not only must individuals be "made nigh," but Jewish and Gentile believers must be ’made both one" (v. 14). This, too, the cross of Christ has accomplished. There Christ broke down the barrier between Jew and Gentile. The enmity between Jew and Gentile was caused by the ordinances which excluded the Gentile from having part in them. By these ordinances the Jew could approach God in an outward way while the Gentile could not. But in the cross Christ has entirely abolished the law of ordinances as a means of approach to God and made a new way of approach by His blood. The Jew who approaches God on the ground of the blood has finished with the Jewish ordinances. The Gentile comes out of his distance from God; the Jew, out of his dispensational nearness, and both are made one in the enjoyment of a common blessing before God, never before possessed by either. The Gentile believers are not raised to the level of Jewish privileges. The Jews are not degraded to the Gentile level. Both are brought onto an entirely new ground on an immeasurably higher plane. But even this does not express the full truth of the Church. Had the apostle stopped here, we should indeed have seen that believers are made nigh by the blood and made one as having all enmity removed, but we might have been left with the thought that we are made one company in happy unity. And that indeed is blessedly true, but, even so, far short of the full truth as

to the Church. So the apostle proceeds further and tells us that we are not only "made nigh," and not only "made both one," but that we are made "one new man" (v. 15), "one Body" (v. 16), indwelt by "one Spirit," by whom we have access to the Father (v. 18). This, indeed, presents the full truth of the Church-the Body of Christ-that, in the ways of God, is being formed on earth.

God is not only saving souls from Jews and Gentiles on the basis of the blood, not only is He gathering such together in unity, but He is forming them into one New Man of which Christ is the glorious Head, believers are the members of the Body, and the Holy Spirit the uniting power. This is far more than unity; it is union. The Church is not simply a company of believers in happy unity, but a company of people who are members of Christ and of one another in intimate union. And the New Man is not merely new in point of time, but is of an entirely new order. Before the cross, as we have seen, there were two men, Jew and Gentile, hating one another and at enmity with God. Now in the marvellous ways of God "One New Man" has come into being. A New Man which embraces every saint on earth united by one Spirit to Christ, the risen and exalted Head.

Connected with the formation of the Church of God on earth are three great truths the apostle refers to: reconciliation to God, the preaching of peace to sinners, and access to the Father on the part of saints.

First, both Jew and Gentile are reconciled to God in one Body (v. 16). God was not content that the Gentile should remain at a distance from Him or that the Jew should be in a place of mere outward nearness, but in actual distance as great as he Gentile. Nor was God content that Jew and Gentile should remain at a distance from one another. Therefore in the cross He has so wondrously worked that both have been brought nigh to Him, and both have been brought nigh to one another, formed into one Body upon which God can look with complacency. The cross has slain the enmity between Jew and Gentile believers, as also that which once stood between both and God. Nothing could more perfectly express the entire removal of the enmity than the fact of the Jewish and Gentile believers being formed into "one Body." It is not said in this verse "One New Man," because that includes Christ the Head, and no thought of reconciliation can be connected with Christ. It is those who compose the Body who need reconciliation, not the One who is the Head. The second great truth is that the gospel of peace is preached to the Gentiles who were far off and to the Jews who were dispensationally near. We can well understand the introduction of the preaching into a passage that shows how the Church is formed on earth. Without the cross there could be no preaching, and without the preaching there would be no Church. Christ is looked at as the Preacher, though the gospel He preaches is proclaimed instrumentally through others. We read of the disciples that "they went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them" (Mark 16:1-20).

There is a third truth of great blessedness. by one Spirit we both (Jew and Gentile) have access to the Father. The distance is not only removed on God’s side, but it is also removed on our side. By the work of Christ on the cross God can draw nigh to us, preaching peace, and by the work of the Spirit in us we can draw nigh to the Father. The cross gives us our title to draw nigh; the Spirit enables us to use our title and practically draw nigh to the Father. But if access is by the Spirit, then clearly there is no room for the flesh. The Spirit excludes the flesh in every form. It is not by buildings, or ritual, or organs, or choirs, or a special class of men that we gain access to the Father. No, all these fleshly means that so impress the natural man will most effectually bar all

access to the Father. It is by the Spirit, but more, it is by "one Spirit," and therefore in the Father's presence all is of one accord. As we rightly sing, "No jarring note shall there discordant sound." Do not flat and low assembly meetings arise from the solemn fact that we have dared to bring into the presence of the Lord unjudged flesh? Or again, meetings otherwise happy are suddenly jarred by an unsuitable hymn or unseasonable ministry, because we are not all led by one Spirit. Do we speak thus to fill any with a morbid dread of introducing that which would quench the Spirit and thus silence them? On the contrary, let such remember that their silence may be as much an intrusion of the flesh as the forwardness of others. Let all judge themselves and so come into the presence of the Lord. Then, indeed, the Spirit will be free to give access to the Father.

Thus far we have viewed the Church as the Body of Christ; but in the ways of God on earth the Church is viewed in other aspects, two of which are brought before us in the closing verses of the chapter (vs. 19-22). First, the Church is viewed as growing unto "an holy Temple in the Lord"; secondly, as "an Habitation of God." In the first aspect the Church is likened to a progressive building growing unto a holy Temple in the Lord. The apostles and prophets form the foundation, Christ Himself being the chief corner stone. Throughout the Christian dispensation believers are being added stone by stone until the last believer is built in and the completed Building displayed in glory. This is the Building of which the Lord says in Matthew 16:1-28, "I will build My Church, and the gates of hades shall not prevail against it." Christ is the builder, not man. Therefore all is perfect, and none but living stones form part of this holy Structure. Peter gives us the spiritual significance of this Building when he tells us that the living stones are built up a spiritual House "to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God," on the one hand, and to "show forth the excellencies" of God, on the other (1 Peter 2:5, 1 Peter 2:9). In Revelation 21:1-27, John sees a vision of the completed Building descending out of Heaven from God and radiant with the glory of God. Then, indeed, from that glorious Building unceasing sacrifices of praise will rise up to God, and a perfect testimony to the excellencies of God will flow forth to man.

Then the apostle, still using the figure of a building, presents another aspect of the Church (v. 22). He views the saints as no longer being built into a growing Temple, but as forming a House already complete for an Habitation of God through the Spirit. All believers on earth at any given moment are looked at as forming the Habitation of God. But the apostle does not merely say "ye are an Habitation," but "ye are builded together for an Habitation." That is, the Habitation is formed of Jewish and Gentile believers "builded together. " The dwelling place of God is marked by light and love; therefore, when the apostle comes to the practical part of the Epistle, he exhorts us as dear children to "walk in love," and to "walk as children of light" (Ephesians 5:2, Ephesians 5:8). The House of God is thus a place of blessing and testimony: a place where the saints are blessed with the favour and love of God; and, thus blessed, they become a testimony to the world around. In Ephesians the Habitation of God is presented according to the mind of God, and therefore only what is real is contemplated. Other Scriptures will show how, unfortunately, in our hands the Habitation has become corrupted until at last we read that judgment must begin at the House of God.

Thus in this chapter we have a threefold presentation of the Church. The Church is viewed as the Body of Christ, composed of Jewish and Gentile believers united to Christ in glory, thus forming one New Man for the display of all that Christ is as the risen Man, Head over all things. For let us remember that the Church is not only "one Body," but it is "His Body," as we read, "the Church

which is His Body." And as His Body it is "the fullness of Him." It is filled with all that He is in order to express all that He is. The Church-His Body-is to be the expression of His mind, just as our bodies give expression to what is in our minds.

Then the Church is a growing Temple composed of all the saints of the whole Christian period wherein sacrifices of praise ascend to God and the excellencies of God are displayed to men.

Lastly, the Church is viewed as a complete Building on earth, composed of all the saints at any given moment, forming the Habitation of God for blessing to His people and testimony to the world.

5. The Church as Administered by Paul Ephesians 3:1-21

We have viewed the Church according to the counsels of God in the first portion of the Epistle to the Ephesians 1:1-23. Ephesians 2:1-10. We have also seen the Church in the ways of God on earth in Ephesians 2:11-22. Coming now to the third chapter, we have the Church presented in connection with the administration of Paul. The whole chapter is a parenthesis. Ephesians 2:1-22 presents the doctrine of the Church; Ephesians 4:1-32, the practical exhortations based upon the doctrine. Between the doctrine and the exhortations we have this important digression in which the Holy Spirit presents the special administration, or service, committed to Paul in connection with the truth of the Church. In connection with this service we learn that it was the insistence upon the truth of the Church that brought the apostle within the walls of a prison. This great truth aroused the special hatred and hostility of the Jew inasmuch as it not only viewed Jew and Gentile in the same position before God -dead in trespasses and sins-but it entirely refused to exalt the Jew to a place of blessing above the Gentile.

We are then informed by what means the apostle acquired his knowledge of the truth of the mystery. It was not through communications from men, but by a direct revelation from God: "By revelation He made known unto me the mystery." This meets a great difficulty that arises in connection with the truth of the mystery. When Paul preached the Gospel in the Jewish synagogues, he invariably appealed to the Scriptures (see Acts 13:27, Acts 13:29, Acts 13:32, Acts 13:35, Acts 13:47; Acts 17:2), and the Jews of Berea are expressly commended inasmuch as they searched the Scriptures to see if the word preached by Paul was in accord with it. But when the apostle ministered the truth of the Church, he could no longer appeal to the Old Testament for confirmation. It would be useless for his hearers to search the Scriptures to see if these things were so. The unbelief of the Jew made it difficult for him to accept many truths that were in his Scriptures, even as Nicodemus failed to grasp the truth of new birth. But to accept something that was not there, something, too, which set aside the whole Jewish system that was there, and which had existed with the sanction of God for centuries, was, to the Jew as such, an insuperable difficulty.

Many Christians can hardly appreciate this difficulty inasmuch as the truth of the Church is largely obscured in their minds, or even totally lost. Viewing the Church as the aggregate of all believers through all time, they have no difficulty in finding what they believe to be the Church in the Old Testament. That this has been the thought of godly men is amply proved by the headings they have given to many Old Testament chapters in the Authorized Version. Accept, however, the truth of the Church, as unfolded in the Epistle to the Ephesians, and at once we are faced with this difficulty which can only be met by the fact that the truth of the Church is an entirely fresh

revelation. This great truth which Paul had received By revelation he speaks of as "the mystery" and again in verse 4 as "the mystery of the Christ." In using the term mystery, Paul does not wish to convey the thought of anything mysterious-a purely human use of the word. In Scripture a mystery is something which has before been kept secret, that could not be otherwise known than by revelation, and, when revealed, can only be apprehended by faith. The apostle proceeds to explain that this mystery was not made known to the sons of men in the Old Testament days but now is made known by revelation unto the "holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit." The prophets spoken of are clearly not Old Testament prophets, any more than in Ephesians 2:20. In both cases the order is "apostles and prophets," not "prophets and apostles," as might be expected had the reference been to the prophets of the Old Testament. Moreover, the apostle is speaking of what is "now" revealed, in contrast to what was formerly revealed.

What then is this mystery? It is clearly not the Gospel which was not hidden in other ages. The Old Testament is full of allusions to the grace of God and to the coming Saviour, though these revelations were but little understood. We are plainly told in verse 6 that this new revelation is that the Gentiles "should be joint heirs, and a joint Body and joint partakers of (His) promise in Christ Jesus by the glad tidings" (N. Tr.). The Gentiles are made joint heirs with the Jews, not in Christ's earthly kingdom, but in that far greater inheritance described in Ephesians 1:1-23 which includes both things in Heaven and things on earth. And more, the Gentile believers are formed with Jewish believers into a joint Body of which Christ is the Head in Heaven. Moreover, they jointly partake of God's promise in Christ Jesus. The Gentile is not raised to the Jewish level on earth, nor is the Jew brought down to the Gentile level. Both are taken off their old standing and raised to an immeasurably higher plane, united to one another on entirely new and heavenly ground in Christ. And all this is brought to pass by the Gospel which addresses both on one common level of guilt and utter ruin. The three great facts referred to in this verse are unfolded in Ephesians 1:1-23. The promise in Christ includes all the blessings unfolded in the first seven verses of that chapter; the inheritance is opened out before us in verses 3-21, and the "one Body" in verses 22 and 23. The mystery can be thus briefly stated within the compass of a single verse, but to lay hold of the greatness of the truth and all that is involved therein, demands the deepest spiritual exercise. One has said, "It is wonderful (amazing) how slow Christians are to understand the largeness of the counsels of God.... In general we are obliged to be much more occupied with the details of the Christian life than with the great principles of this life." In the contemplation of the mystery we are carried back before the foundation of the world to find its source in the heart of the Father. There all was counselled according to His good pleasure. There, too, in God, this great mystery remained hidden throughout the ages of time, until, in the ways of God, the moment was ripe for its revelation. Before that moment was reached, great events must transpire: the world must be tested and proved to be an utterly ruined world; Christ must be manifested in the flesh and His redemption work accomplished; He must be raised from the dead and seated in the glory; lastly, the Holy Spirit must come to earth. The presence of Christ on earth was the final and greatest test for man. Dwelling among men, full of grace and truth, He "went about doing good." On every hand He manifested a power that could relieve man of every possible ill-whether from sin, disease, death, or the devil. Moreover, with a heart filled with compassion, He manifested a grace that used His power on behalf of sinful men. In result, all this manifestation of divine goodness only brought to light the absolute hatred of man for the perfect goodness of God. It was the final demonstration of the complete ruin of man whether Jew or Gentile. The Jews, utterly rejecting the long-promised

Messiah, sealed their doom in saying, "We have no King but Caesar." This was apostasy. The Gentiles proved their utter ruin by using the government that God had put into their hands to condemn the Son of God after having judicially pronounced Him innocent. The cross was man's answer to God's love-the final proof that not only is man a sinner, but a ruined sinner, beyond all hope of recovery in himself. What happens? The Christ that the world has rejected ascends to glory, and the world comes under judgment. The light of the world is put out, and the world is left in darkness. The Prince of life is slain, and the world is left in death. Death and darkness cover the whole scene, Jew and Gentile both alike, dead to God in trespasses and sins. Is there, then no more hope for a ruined world? Must the world roll on to judgment with its vast freight of ruined souls? Has man been vanquished by sin and death? Has the Devil thwarted the purposes of God, encompassed man in hopeless ruin and triumphed over all? As far as man is concerned there is but one answer. All is ruined-irretrievably ruined. The cross proves that it is not a dying world, but a dead world, "Because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead." But in this supreme crisis, when the end of the world is reached and its awful history of sin is closed in death, then God falls back upon His eternal counsels, acts according to His own good pleasure, and in due time discloses the secrets of His heart. If the world is dead, God lives, and the living God acts according to His counsels. The world had put the Christ of God upon a cross of shame: God raises Christ from among the dead and seats Him upon a throne of glory; in due time, on the great day of Pentecost, the Spirit of God comes into the world from the glorified Christ. Wonderful indeed was that moment when the earth was waste and empty and darkness was upon the face of the deep and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters, but far more wonderful the day when the Spirit of God came into a world that had ruined itself by putting out the light of the world and putting to death the Prince of life. May we not say that once again "darkness was upon the face of the deep," and once again "the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters"? God commences a new creation work based, not upon a dying man, but upon "Christ the Son of the living God"-the beginning of the Creation of God. From the midst of a world of apostate Jews and godless Gentiles, God calls out a great company of quickened souls, redeemed by blood, and forgiven according to the riches of His grace; and not only calls them out of a ruined world but unites them in one Body with Christ their Head in Heaven. They are not of the world from which Christ has been rejected, even as He is not of the world (John 17:16), but they belong to Heaven where Christ is seated, their risen and exalted Head. Moreover they will be associated with Christ in His glorious inheritance when He will have dominion over the whole created universe of God, whether they be things in Heaven or things on earth.

Such then is this great mystery, in other ages not made known unto the sons of men, but now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit, and ministered to us through the apostle Paul. For of this great truth, as the apostle tells us, he was made a minister (v. 7). It is not that it was not revealed to the other apostles-Paul tells us that it was — but to him was committed the special service of ministering this truth to the saints. Hence only in the epistles of Paul do we find any unfolding of the mystery. The grace of God had given this ministry to the apostle, and the power of God enabled him to use the gift of grace. God's gifts can be used only in God's power.

Moreover the apostle tells us the effect this great truth had upon himself (v. 8). In the presence of the greatness of God's grace, he sees that he is the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15); in the presence of the immense vista of blessing unfolded by the mystery, he feels that he is less than

the least of all saints. The greater the glories that are opened to our vision, the smaller we become in our own eyes. The man who had the largest apprehension of this great mystery in all its vast extent, was the man who owns he is less than the least of all saints. In order to fulfil his ministry, the apostle preached among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ (v. 8). Paul not only proclaimed the irretrievable ruin of man, but the unsearchable riches of Christ, riches beyond all human computation, carrying blessings that have no limit. Could we search to the end of His riches, we should not reach the limit of the blessings that these riches bestow. The preaching of the Gospel, however, was in view of the second part of Paul's service-to enlighten all with the knowledge of "the administration of the mystery" (v. 9, N. Tr.). Not simply to enlighten all with the truth of the mystery, but with the knowledge of how it is administered; to show all men how the counsel of God from eternity to eternity is brought about in time by the formation of the Assembly on earth, and thus bring to light in public that which has hitherto been hidden in God from the beginning of the world. But more, not only would God have all men enlightened as to the formation of the Assembly on earth, but it is His intent that now all the heavenly beings should learn in the Church the manifold wisdom of God. These heavenly beings had seen the creation come fresh from the hands of God, and, as they beheld His wisdom in creation, they sang for joy. Now in the formation of the Church they see "the all-various wisdom of God" (v. 10, N. Tr.). Creation was the most perfect expression of creatorial wisdom; but in the formation of the Church, God's wisdom is displayed in every form. Before the Church could be formed, God's glory had to be vindicated, man's need must be met, sin must be put away, death abolished, and the power of Satan annulled. The barrier must be removed between Jew and Gentile, Heaven opened, Christ seated as a Man in the glory, the Holy Spirit come to earth and the Gospel preached. All this and more is involved in the formation of the Church, and these varied ends could be attained only by the all-various wisdom of God-wisdom displayed, not only in one direction, but in every direction. Thus the Church on earth becomes the lesson book of heavenly and angelic beings. Nor has the failure of the Church in its responsibilities altered the fact that in the Church the angels learn this lesson. On the contrary, it only makes more manifest the marvellous wisdom that, rising above all man's failure, overcoming every obstacle, at last brings the Church to glory "according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." In the following verses (12 and 13) the apostle turns aside from the unfolding of the mystery to give a brief word as to its practical effect. These wonders are not unrolled before our vision simply to be admired, admirable indeed as they are, for as David said of the House of God, it is "exceeding magnifical." But it is equally true that the mystery is exceedingly practical, and in these two verses we see the effect of the mystery when rightly apprehended and acted upon. It is a truth that will make us at home in God's world, but put us outside man's world. As the blind man of John 9:1-41, when cast out by the religious world, finds himself in the presence of the Son of God, so Paul has access to the palace in Heaven (v. 12), but finds himself in a prison on earth (v. 13). Christ Jesus, the One through whom all these eternal purposes will be fulfilled, is the One by whom we have access by faith to the Father. If in Christ we are going to be set before God holy, without blame, in love, then in Christ we have holy boldness even now and access to the Father with confidence. This great truth makes us at home in the presence of the Father. But in the world it will lead to tribulation. This Paul found, but he says, "Faint not at my tribulations." To accept the truth of the mystery-to walk in the light of it-will at once put us outside the course of this world and, above all, outside the religious world. Act upon this truth and at once we shall meet the opposition of the religious world. It will be with us as it was

with Paul, a continual struggle, and especially with all that Judaizes. And it must be so, for these great truths entirely undermine the worldly constitution of every manmade religious system. Is the truth of the mystery, with the knowledge of which Paul sought to enlighten all men, proclaimed from the pulpits of Christendom, from holiness conventions, or even from evangelical platforms? Is the truth of the mystery involving the total ruin of man, the utter rejection of Christ by the world, the session of Christ in glory, and the presence of the Holy Spirit on earth, the separation of the believer from the world, and the calling of the saints to Heaven-is this great truth proclaimed or acted upon in the national churches and religious denominations of Christendom? No, it has no place in their creeds, their prayers, or their teaching. More and worse, it is denied by their very constitution, their teaching, and their practice. But if this is so, we have a resource. We can pray, and hence these two verses (12 and 13) lead quite naturally to the prayer of the apostle with which the chapter closes. If we have boldness and access with confidence, then we can pray. If we are faced with tribulations, then we must pray. So that in the presence of the special service given to Paul to minister the truth, and the tribulation in which this service involved him, he has only one resource, to bow his knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The prayer m the first of Ephesians was addressed to the "God of our Lord Jesus Christ." There Christ is viewed as a Man in relation to God, and from Christ set over all, we look down upon the inheritance spread out in all its vast extent of glory. Here the prayer is addressed to the "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," and Christ is viewed as the Son in relation to the Father, and instead of looking down upon the inheritance, we look up to divine Persons. The request in the first prayer is that we might know the hope of His calling, the glory of His inheritance, and the exceeding greatness of His power. But this prayer rises beyond the calling, extends beyond the inheritance, and leads to that which is greater than power. For here the apostle prays, not only that we may know the hope of the calling, but that Christ-the One in whom we are called- may dwell in our hearts; not only that we may know the riches of His inheritance, but that we may know the fullness of God; not only that we may know His exceeding power, but that we may know the love of Christ that passes knowing. In order that these requests may be granted, the apostle prays that there might be a special work by the Holy Spirit in the inner man. In the first prayer the power is toward us; here the power works in us. There it was the enlightenment of the eyes to see the inheritance; here it is a work in the heart to comprehend the love. To enter into the deep things of God we must be rooted and grounded in love. To be rooted and grounded in the knowledge of the schools will be of no avail in learning the mysteries of God. Here we touch a region beyond the wit of man. We are in contact with things that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, things which God alone can teach through our affections. Thus when Christ dwells in the heart by faith, and we are rooted and grounded in love, then we shall be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length, and depth, and height. The apostle does not exactly say to what these terms refer, but has he not in view the infinite counsels of God, long hidden, but now at last disclosed in the mystery? This it is possible to comprehend, but there is that which passes knowing-the love of Christ. It can be perfectly enjoyed, but we shall never reach its end or fathom its depths.

Here we are launched upon a shoreless sea whose depths no line has ever fathomed. In the knowledge of this love we shall be filled with all the fullness of God. The "fullness of God" is that with which God is filled. Christ is the fullness of God, as we read, "in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 2:9, N. Tr.). The Church is the fullness of Christ-"the fullness of Him that filleth all in all" (Ephesians 1:23). God alone can lead our hearts into the knowledge of

Christ’s love and thus fill us with His fullness. For He is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us. It is not doing things for us, however true that may be, but here it is doing a work in us. The apostle is not speaking of our circumstances and daily needs and all that His mercy can do for us; he is speaking of that vast universe of blessing into which He can lead our souls by a work in us. Nor does the apostle say, "Above all that we can ask or think," as the verse is sometimes wrongly quoted. One has said, "There is a great difference between what we do ask and think, and what we can ask and think. There is no limit to what we may ask." Nor can we limit what God can do in the saints for their blessing and His glory. This leads the apostle to close with a burst of praise: "To Him be glory in the Assembly in Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of ages. Amen" (N. Tr.). It was Paul’s high privilege to administer the mystery in time, but, says Paul, let it be to the glory of God throughout eternity. Counselled in eternity before the foundation of the world, it will exist for the glory of God throughout eternity, when the world shall be no more.

6. The Church as the House of God According to the Mind of God

There are two main aspects in which the Church is viewed in the New Testament; one as the Body of Christ, the other as the House of God. When the Church is viewed in the former aspect, it is composed of all believers on earth formed into one Body and united to one Head in Heaven by the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Colossians 1:18). When the Church is viewed as the House of God according to the mind of God, it is composed of Jewish and Gentile believers builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit (Ephesians 2:22). The one Body presents the heavenly aspect of the Church. Believers are constituted a heavenly people by reason of their union with Christ in Heaven as the Head of the Body. The House of God, on the other hand, always presents the Church in connection with the earth. The formation and maintenance of the one Body is outside the responsibility of man, and therefore nothing that is unreal has any part in the one Body. It is true all believers are responsible to maintain the truth of the one Body and walk according to the light of it, and in this we have grievously failed; but the one Body itself is formed only of true believers and by the Holy Spirit. The House of God, on the other hand, has been placed in the responsibility of man and, as ever, man breaks down; thus worthless material has been brought into the House of God leading to the solemn statement of the apostle Peter that "Judgment must begin at the House Of God" (1 Peter 4:17).

Before, however, we can form any just idea of our responsibilities in connection with the House of God or estimate the extent of our failure in carrying out these responsibilities, it is essential to have clearly before our minds the House of God according to the original purpose of God. For this we must turn to the Word of God. It is impossible to learn from a corrupted Christendom the original purpose of the Divine Architect in having a House on earth.

Turning to Scripture, we are at once faced with the fact that the House of God has a very large place both in the Old Testament and the New. The first mention of it is in Genesis 28:1-22; the last, in Revelation 21:1-27. From the first book to the last, from the present creation in time right on to the new Heaven and new earth in eternity, the House of God is one of the great unchanging objects before the mind of God.

It is true the composition of the House is very different at different times. In the Old Testament days it was formed of boards and curtains, and later of material stones. Today, in the purpose of

God, the House is composed of "living stones." But while its composition varies, the purpose of the House remains the same. Whatever form it takes, the purpose is ever to constitute a dwelling-place for God. Solomon expresses this thought when he says, "I have built an house of habitation for Thee, and a place for Thy dwelling for ever" (2 Chronicles 6:2). God, for the gratification of His own heart. determined to dwell with men.

It must, however, be evident that God's House must have certain characteristics. Whatever form it may take, it must of necessity be suited to God. The first Epistle to Timothy was specially written to instruct us in the behaviour suited to the House of God (1 Timothy 3:15). But in order to have right behaviour, it is essential that we know the characteristic marks of God's House.

Holiness is the first great characteristic feature, as we read in Psalms 93:5, "Holiness becometh Thine House, O Lord, for ever." Again we read, in Ezekiel 43:12, "This is the law of the House; upon the top of the mountain the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy. Behold, this is the law of the House." Holiness, then, is the first law of the House. In accord with this, Timothy is to charge those who form the House of God to maintain "love out of a pure heart, a good conscience and faith unfeigned," and, moreover, to refuse all conduct contrary to sound teaching (1 Timothy 1:5-10). Furthermore, the House of God must be marked by dependence upon God. Thus prayer has a large place in it, for prayer is the expression of dependence upon God. So we read, "I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands" (1 Timothy 2:8). All that are in God's House must be dependent upon the God that dwells there. Moreover, another great characteristic is subjection to authority. In the House of God the woman is to learn in subjection and not usurp authority over the man (1 Timothy 2:11-12). Finally, it is marked by oversight and care. Oversight in regard to the spiritual welfare of souls (1 Timothy 3:1-7), and care as to the temporal needs of the bodies of men (8-13). The world is marked by unholiness, independence, the revolt against all authority, with no spiritual oversight and no adequate care for the bodies of men; but in the House of God entirely opposite conditions are to prevail. There according to the mind of God holiness must be maintained; there all must be in dependence upon God; there all must be in subjection to the authority that God has ordained; and there souls are fed and bodies are cared for.

These, then, are some of the leading characteristics. Holiness, dependence, subjection, oversight, and care. Moreover, these characteristics are necessary in view of the purpose of God in His House being duly carried out.

What, then, is the great purpose that God has at heart in dwelling amongst men? First, if God has a dwelling-place among men, it is in order that God may be known in blessing to men. Second, if man is blessed, it is in order that God may be praised. These are the two great ends purposed in connection with the House of God-God made known to man in blessing in order that man may turn to God in praise. In view of the purpose of God, it becomes quite plain that the privilege and responsibility of those who have part in the House of God are to express God and to praise God. These leading principles are very beautifully presented in the first passage in Scripture that speaks of the House of God- Genesis 28:10-22. There Jacob, the houseless wanderer, has a vision of the House of God, and at once there passes before us the purpose of God and the responsibility of man in connection with God's House. God reveals Himself to Jacob as the One who is determined to bless man in sovereign grace. "In thee," says God, "and in thy seed shall ail the families of the

earth be blessed." Moreover, what God has promised He will perform. He will be faithful to His own word. "I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." Then on our side we have the twofold responsibility of man. Jacob says, "This is none other but the House of God, and this is the gate of Heaven." Thereupon he sets up "a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it." The gate presents the thought of access to Heaven. Through the gate we are enabled to get in touch with Heaven for praise and prayer. And be it said this gate is not in some far-off place beyond the bounds of earth. The gate of Heaven is always on earth, and here, while we are on earth, we are to use the gate. The pillar, as we know from the story of Jacob's parting with Laban, carries with it the thought of witness (Genesis 31:52). Thus we have our twofold responsibility in connection with the House. On the one hand to approach God in prayer and praise, on the other, to approach man as a witness for God-a witness that can only be carried out in the power of the Spirit, as set forth in the pillar with the oil poured out on the top.

Turning to 2 Chronicles 6:1-42, we shall see the purpose of God and the responsibility of man again presented at the dedication of the house built by king Solomon. First we see it is the place where God presents Himself in blessing to man. The king, representing the attitude of God to man, "turned his face, and blessed the whole congregation of Israel" (v. 3). Moreover, the king bears testimony to the faithfulness of God to His word, "The Lord, therefore, hath performed His word that He hath spoken (vs. 4, 10, 15). Then on the side of man's responsibility and privilege, we see that Solomon's temple becomes the gate of Heaven. Nine times the king requests that prayer towards this place may be heard in Heaven. The House becomes the gate of access to Heaven (vs. 21-40). Finally, the House that Solomon built was, like Jacob's pillar, to be a witness to God among all the nations of the earth, as he says, "that all people of the earth may know Thy Name, and fear Thee, as doth Thy people Israel, and may know that this House which I have built is called by Thy Name" (v. 33).

Turning to the New Testament, we see in the First Epistle of Peter that, though the form of the House of God has altered, the purpose of God and the responsibilities of man in connection with the House, remain the same. Here, it is no longer a material House of dead stones, but a spiritual House of living stones. "Ye," says the apostle, "as living stones are built up a spiritual House" (1 Peter 2:5). In the first chapter of the Epistle we learn that those who form this House are the subjects of God's sovereign blessing, as we read, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven for you." Then we further learn that this blessing is secured by "The Word of the Lord," which "endureth for ever.' Passing on to chapter 2, we find the presentation of our privileges and responsibilities in connection with the House. On the one hand we are built together "to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." On the other, before men, we are to "set forth the excellencies of Him (N. Tr.) who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light." Here, then, we have once again 'the gate of Heaven" and "the pillar" with the anointing oil. We draw nigh to God to offer up praise and prayer; we draw nigh to men as a witless of His excellencies.

Finally we may ask: when did the House of God, in its present form, come into existence? Very definitely Scripture answers-not until redemption was accomplished. If God is to come into the midst of a praising people, then Christ must first go into the darkness and forsaking of the cross.

There we hear that cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" And the One that uttered the cry alone can give the answer, "Thou art holy, O Thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel." If the holy God is to dwell in the midst of a praising people, Christ must redeem a people by going into death.

Jacob, as we nave seen, may speak of the House of God, but not until redemption is accomplished does God speak of dwelling among the children of Israel (see Exodus 29:45). Neither with Adam the innocent nor with Abraham the faithful could God dwell. He may indeed walk in the garden, and grant a passing visit to Abraham, but neither innocence nor faithfulness secured a dwelling-place for God. Mere innocence would not suit God’s House; the faithfulness of man would not secure it when innocence was lost. God’s dwelling amongst men is the fruit of redemption, for therein is the believer made fit for God, and therein is a holy God made known to man. It is clear that "the House of God which is the Assembly of the living God" had no existence until redemption was accomplished. Then on the day of Pentecost, the disciples being together in one place at Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit descended and "filled all the House where they were sitting," and "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit." The people of God who had hitherto been scattered abroad were then formed into the Habitation for God, and God took up His dwelling-place in the House.

7. The Church as the House of God in the Hands of Men In the last chapter we sought to learn from Scripture the truth of the House of God when viewed according to the mind of God. We have seen the purpose of God in dwelling amongst men and the responsibilities of men in connection with God’s dwelling .

We have now to inquire: has man answered to his responsibilities? Sadly, the history of the ages has proved that man in responsibility has invariably broken down; the higher the privilege and the greater the responsibility, the greater the breakdown. Thus in nothing has the failure of man been so complete as in connection with the Church viewed as the House of God on earth. To form a true estimate of the extent of this failure, it is essential to obtain a clear view of the House of God according to God’s original plan. In the days when the children of Israel were in captivity because of their failure to maintain the holiness of God’s House, the prophet Ezekiel is told to ’shew the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities: and let them measure the pattern" (Ezekiel 43:10). Only thus would it be brought home to them how great had been their departure from the pattern. As we nave seen in the history of Jacob, man’s responsibility in connection with the House was set forth by "the gate" and "the pillar." The gate of Heaven being Godward and expressing our privilege and responsibility to draw nigh to God in prayer and praise; the pillar, with the oil, being manward and setting forth our responsibility to maintain a true witness for God before men. We have failed in both directions; we have not adequately used the gate of Heaven, and consequently we have not reared our pillar. We have failed in prayer and dependence upon God, and therefore we have failed in testimony before men.

Moreover, it must be admitted that in order that the House of God may be a true expression of God, there must be the maintenance of the characteristic marks of the House. For all the characteristics of God’s House have in view the true expression of God Himself. Hence in the House holiness must be maintained in order that there may be a true expression of God. Then, too, prayer is to be made for "all men," because this expresses God’s desire that all men should be

saved. Women are to be marked by modesty and "good works," for in good works there is the setting forth of the goodness of God to man. So, too, the House is to be marked by the care of souls and bodies, for thus it will be seen that God has at heart the welfare of men.

Finally the House of God is to be marked by "godliness" (1 Timothy 3:14-16). It is obvious that none other than godly behaviour is suited to the House of God. When we see that the great purpose of God's House is to express God, it will become plain that godliness consists in a life that makes God manifest. Hence it is not sanctimoniousness, nor is it merely an amiable and benevolent life such as it is possible for the natural man to exhibit. The godly life is a life lived in the fear of God and hence the life that expresses God. The secret of this life lies in having before our souls the perfect pattern of godliness as set forth in Christ. Thus in the closing verses of the third chapter of 1 Timothy, the apostle gives a remarkable summary of the life of Christ, from the incarnation to the ascension, in which the Spirit of God has brought together certain great facts in that life which express God. God manifest in the flesh, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory, are all facts that make the heart of God known to man. Thus we learn in Christ the secret of godliness or the life that expresses God.

What a marvellous expression of God there would have been in the sight of the world if the Church as the House of the living God had remained true to the principles of God's House. The world would have seen a company of people marked by holiness, dependence upon God, subjection to authority, good works, and care for bodies and souls. They would have seen the setting forth of principles entirely opposite to those which prevail in the fallen world, and above all, they would have learned the attitude of God towards man. Unfortunately, it is evident from every point of view that those who compose the House of God have utterly failed. We have failed to maintain the great principles of God's House and thus have failed to give a true expression of God before the world.

How has this failure been brought about? The history of Israel, and their failure in connection with the House of God in their day, may disclose to us the secret of our own failure. The prophet Ezekiel is told to say to the "rebellious" house of Israel, "Ye have brought into My sanctuary strangers, uncircumcised m heart, and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in My sanctuary, to pollute it, even My house .... And ye have not kept the charge of Mine holy things: but ye have set keepers of My charge in My sanctuary for yourselves" (Ezekiel 44:6-8). Here we have three definite charges: they introduced into the House those who had no part nor lot in the House; they failed to maintain the holiness of the House; and they used the House of God for their own ends-"for themselves." Has this not been the sad history of the House of God in the present dispensation? On the day of Pentecost those who formed the House of God by the descent of the Holy Spirit were no "strangers"; all were true children of God. There were no "uncircumcised in heart" among the three thousand added to the Church by the Lord. Every one was a true believer. But how soon the "stranger" was brought in. By the baptism of Simon Magus one was introduced into the company where the Spirit of God dwelled, who had no part nor lot in the matter; others soon followed, with the result that even in the apostles' day the House of God became likened to a great house in which "there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour" (2 Timothy 2:20) . Thus, as with Israel of old, the holiness of the House has not been maintained and men are using the House of God for their own ends, "teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of base gain" (Titus 1:11, N. Tr.). The evils of the apostles' days have been increasing through the ages, until, in these last days, there is a vast

mass of lifeless profession in the House of God marked by the form of godliness without the power of (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

What, then, is the result of the failure of man in responsibility? As in Israel's case, the evil that as been brought into the House of God calls aloud or judgment. "The time is come that judgment must begin at the House of God" (1 Peter 4:17). In Israel's day the time came when the Lord refused to recognize the temple as the House of God. He had to say, "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate" (Matthew 23:38). All the true children of God in connection with the temple were added to the Church, and the desolate house passed on to judgment. Again, the Church as the House of God has become corrupted, and very soon all that is of God will be caught away to meet the Lord in the air, and the vast mass of godless profession, no longer owned as the House of God, will pass on to judgment.

Has, then, God's purpose to dwell among men been thwarted by the failure of man in responsibility? Surely not. No lapse of time, no change of dispensation, no failure of God's people, no opposition of the enemy, no power of death can for one moment move the heart of God from His determined purpose to have His House on earth and dwell among men. The moment a redeemed people are secured, God discloses the desire of His heart to dwell in their midst (see Exodus 15:13, Exodus 15:17; Exodus 29:45). The tabernacle in the wilderness and the temple in the land bear their witness to God's cherished thought. And though the people fail and neglect the House, though their temple is destroyed and they pass into captivity yet not for one moment will God surrender His purpose to dwell in the midst of His people. He brings back a remnant to rebuild His House; they, too, utterly fail and in their turn are scattered among the nations, and once again the House is left without a stone upon a stone. Nevertheless, God pursues His glorious way. Rising above all the failure of men, He discloses fresh secrets of His heart and brings to light "the House of God which is the Assembly of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth." But again man in responsibility breaks down; the House of God becomes a ruin. Instead of being marked by holiness, it is likened to the great house of a mere man in which there are vessels to honour and dishonour. A little remnant may indeed separate from the vessels to dishonour and seek to return to the moral features of the House of God and walk according to the principles which govern the House of God, but they, too, break down, and the responsibility of man closes in judgment that commences at the House of God. Nevertheless, though all breaks down in the hands of men, whether it be Israel of old or the Church in the present day, yet God remains true to His purpose, and there rises up before us the vision of another House, in a millennial day, and "the latter glory of this House shall be greater than the former."

Yet even so this House will pass away, for the glorious millennial age will end in gloom and judgment. But God will not give up His purpose, for beyond the judgment of the nations, and beyond the judgment of the great white throne, there is unrolled before us "a new Heaven and a new earth" and, in that fair scene, we see "the holy city new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of Heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband," and we hear "a great voice out of Heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them and be their God." We have travelled beyond the bounds of time with all its changes and its broken responsibilities. We have reached eternity with its new Heaven and new earth; we have passed into a scene where all tears are wiped away, where "there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be

any more pain: for the former things are passed away." And there we see God’s great purpose throughout the ages at last fulfilled, never more to be marred by the power of the enemy or the failure of the saints.

8. The Church as the Body of Christ In former chapters, after taking a general view of the truth concerning the Church, we considered a special aspect of it-the House of God. There is, however, another important aspect in which the Church is presented in Scripture, namely as the Body of Christ. This we may briefly consider. In reference to this aspect of the Church, the language of Scripture is very precise. We read in Colossians 1:18, that Christ "is the Head of the Body, the Church," and again in 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, that "as the Body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one Body, being many, are one Body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one Body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." From these Scriptures it is plain that all believers are formed into one Body by the Holy Spirit on earth with one Head in Heaven. We have seen that men were introduced by baptism with water into the Christian profession which forms the House of God on earth. It is clear, however, that no baptism by water can bring people into the Body of Christ. This can only be effected by the baptism of the Holy Spirit Thus nothing but what is real can have any part in the Body of Christ. In thinking of the Body of Christ, we must look at Christians solely in the light of God’s work in them. It is true that the flesh is yet in us, but God has condemned it, and viewing us apart from it, sees us "in Christ" and "in the Spirit." That is, God ever views His people in connection with Christ and the Spirit, and we are privileged to view ourselves in the same way. Another has said, "It is in this light only that we can speak of the membership of the Body; nothing finds place in any way in the Body of Christ but what is of Christ-of God. There is no such thing imaginable in the Body of Christ as failure or flesh." Those who compose the Body, having the flesh in them, may indeed fail to walk in correspondence to the truth, but in the Body itself all is of Christ. It is His Body.

There are three portions of Scripture which, in a special way, present this great truth: Ephesians 1:1-23 and Ephesians 2:1-22; Colossians 1:1-29 and Colossians 3:1-25; and 1 Corinthians 12:1-31 and 1 Corinthians 14:1-40. In Ephesians the Body is presented in its eternal aspect according to the counsels of the Father. In Colossians it is viewed in its time aspect as the vessel for the display of Christ. In Corinthians the Body is introduced as the instrument for the manifestations of the Spirit on earth. The manifestations of the Spirit through the Body have in view the display of Christ in the Body in time; and the display of Christ now is but the prelude to the setting forth of Christ in His fullness in the ages to come according to the counsels of the Father.

First, then, we may consider the truth of the Body according to the Father’s counsels. In Ephesians 1:1-23 the great subject is the Father’s purpose for the glory of Christ. The chapter unfolds "the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself for the administration of the fullness of times; to head up all things in the Christ" (vv. 9, 10, N. Tr.). Moreover, in these counsels the Church has a place of highest privilege in connection with the glory of Christ, and hence we also learn the future destiny of the Church as the Body of Christ. Here the Church is viewed, not in relation to present time, but in relation to the "fullness of times." We are permitted to look beyond the present moment, with all its failure, and see the future glory of the Church as the Body of Christ. In that day "the Church which is His Body" will be "the fullness of Him that filleth all in all" (vv. 22, 23). According to the counsel of God, the day is coming when

Christ will fill all things. The whole universe will be filled with blessing through Christ, but, in that day, it will be the special privilege of the Church to express "the fulness of Him that filleth all in all." Though all will be blessed through Christ, and be to the glory of Christ, yet all will not express His fullness. This will be reserved for the Church. An individual saint may display some trait of Christ, all things in the world to come will display Christ in yet larger measure, but only in the Church as the Body of Christ will there be the perfect display of Christ in all His fullness. Fullness gives the thought of completeness. Thus not only will Christ be displayed, but He will be displayed in perfection. That is, not only every excellence of Christ will be seen, but all will be seen in right proportion. No one trait will predominate; all will be displayed in perfect proportion and relation to one another in the same way that the members of a normal human body are all in proportion and set forth the mind of the head. But what will be actually true then should be morally true now. This leads to the truth of the Body as the vessel for the display of Christ in time. For this aspect of the Church as the Body of Christ, we must turn so the Epistle to the Colossians the great object of this epistle is to unfold the glories of Christ as the Head. We read in Colossians 1:18, "He is the Head of the Body, the Church." It is, moreover, God’s desire that the moral glories of the Head in Heaven should have a present display in the Body on earth. Thus the apostle, having spoken of the ministry of the Gospel, passes on to speak of a second ministry in connection with the Body of Christ "which is the Church" (v. 24). He speaks of this truth as "the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints." Moreover, he speaks of the glory of this mystery as "Christ in you, the hope of glory." The apostle lays special emphasis on these two great facts. First, the particular moment when the mystery is revealed, and second, the special glory of this mystery at the present time. These two great facts have a direct bearing on one another. Why, we may ask, is the mystery made known "now," and not before? Because three great events had come to pass without which the Church could not exist as a fact or be made known as a truth. Christ had been exalted as the glorious Head in Heaven, the Holy Spirit had come to earth, and lastly, Christ had been finally rejected by the Jew. The first two events were absolutely necessary before the Church could be formed. There must be the Head in Heaven before there could be the Body on earth, and the Holy Spirit must come to dwell in the members and thus form them into one Body on earth with one Head in Heaven. But the Body existed as a fact before the truth was made known. For this the third great event was necessary. If the truth of Jew and Gentile being formed into one Body had been revealed before Christ was rejected, it would have contradicted all the express promises of God to the Jew under the first covenant. But when the Jew had finally rejected Christ, the first covenant was definitely at an end, and the way is prepared for unfolding the truth of the Church as the Body of Christ. The rejection was final and complete when Stephen was stoned. By the cross man had rejected Christ on earth, and by the martyrdom of Stephen they rejected Christ in Heaven. They stoned the man that witnessed to the fact that Christ is in Heaven. Thus the moment arrived to disclose the great secret that, though Christ Himself has been rejected, His Body is on earth. Mark, not that sinners saved by grace will be in Heaven-that is the Gospel and there is no mystery about it; the dying thief knew that-but the secret is now revealed that Christ has the Church-His Body-in the place of His rejection during the time of His rejection. The first intimation of this great truth is given in connection with the conversion of the man who was made the minister of this truth. The Lord says to Saul, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" It is not, "Why do you persecute My disciples," or "those belonging to Me," or "those who are part of Me," but "Why persecutest thou ME?" As one has said, "In that little

word is conveyed the fact that Christ is here."

Moreover, if Christ is here in those that form His Body, it is that Christ may be displayed by His Body. And Christ displayed in the Church now is "the hope of glory." In glory, as we have seen from the Epistle to the Ephesians, Christ will be displayed in His fullness. But the hope of glory is to have a present fulfilment. Hence the apostle passes on to show how Christ in the saints is to work out in the display of Christ by the saints. Thus God's present thought for the Body-composed of all saints at any given moment on the earth-is that therein there should be the setting forth of Christ morally, and thus the Body on earth correspond to the Head in Heaven. In the second chapter of Colossians the apostle shows how God has worked to bring this to pass and warns us of the different devices by which the devil seeks to frustrate the present purpose of God in the saints. First we are warned against the delusive opinions of men, presented in the most attractive way by persuasive speech (v. 4); then philosophy, or the love of human wisdom drawn from the traditions of men and the elements of the world (v. 8); further, we are warned against religious flesh, connected with abstinence from certain food and the observance of certain days (v. 16); finally we are warned against superstition, such as worshipping angels (v. 18).

If we are to display the moral beauties of Christ, we must know Christ. We must know the One whose character we are to set forth. The opinions of men. the philosophy of man, the religion of the flesh, and the superstitions of men will neither teach us anything of the character of Christ nor enable us to set forth that character when known.

After we are warned concerning the snares of the enemy, we are instructed as to the provision that God has made in order that the moral perfections of the Head may be set forth in the Body. In this connection four great truths are stated:

1. We are "complete in Him" (v. 10).

2. We are identified with Him (vs. 11, 13).

3. We are of Him: "the Body is of Christ" (v.17).

4. We derive all spiritual nourishment from Him (v. 19).

1. We are "complete in Him." In Him there dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead; therefore, everything that we can possibly need in order that we may know Christ and display Christ is found in Him-we are complete in Him. We are entirely independent of man as man. His opinions, his philosophy, and his religion cannot bring us to Christ cannot unfold His character to us, or enable us to set forth His moral beauties.

2. We are identified with Him.'' At the cross, in burial, in resurrection, and in life, God has identified the believer with Christ. At the cross-set forth by circumcision-Christ actually died to everything after the flesh; in burial He actually passed out of sight; in resurrection He actually passed forever out of the dominion of death; and as quickened He passed into a scene of glory in a life and condition that is wholly suited to the glory of God. Now what is actually true of Christ is true of the saints in the sight of God who identifies us "with Him," and faith sees with God. We know that our flesh has been put off in the death of Christ; and not only put off but put out of sight, for we are "buried with Him in baptism." Moreover, in spirit we are risen with Him, so that death has lost its power over us. And though our mortal bodies are not yet quickened, as to our souls, we live to

God in that heavenly life set forth in Christ.

3. We are of His order-"the body is of Christ." The ordinances of the law were but shadows and were given to the first man who is of the earth, earthly. But the things to come, of which the ordinances were but the shadow, are of Christ, the heavenly Man. And if Christ is heavenly, the Body which is of Christ is also heavenly. "As the heavenly One, such also the heavenly ones." For the moment we are on earth, but we are of the heavenly Man, and we thus belong to Heaven.

4. We derive all nourishment from the Head. If the Church is heavenly, it can only be nourished from Heaven. There is nothing of earth that can minister to the man of Heaven. There is nothing Of man as such that can minister nourishment to the Body, bind the members together, or lead to spiritual increase. All must come from the Head in Heaven, ministered to the Body through the joints and bands of the Body. As the Head in Heaven is for the nourishment of the Body on earth, so the Body on earth is for the display of the Head in Heaven. Through not holding the Head, we may fail to set forth the Head, but Christ-the Head-will never fail to nourish His Body; He cares for the Body and every member of the Body.

These four great facts-that we are "complete in Him," that we are identified "with Him," are of Him, and derive all nourishment from Him-all lead to the fulfilment of God’s present purpose for the Body, namely, the setting forth of the character of the Head in the Body. This is seen in a practical way in the exhortations that follow.

Based on the of the Church in the first two chapters, we are exhorted to "put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any should have a complaint against any; even as the Christ has forgiven you, so also do ye. And to all these add love, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of Christ preside in your hearts, to which also ye have been called in one Body, and be thankful" (Colossians 3:12-15, JND. Tr.). This is the lovely character of Christ, marked by grace with its unlimited forgiveness, by love binding all other perfections together, and by peace ruling the heart, which the saints, in the unity of "one Body," are called to display while yet in the scene of Christ’s absence and waiting for the day of His appearing.

What a beautiful setting forth of Christ there would be if the saints, as "one Body," were marked by grace, and love, and peace. Though in a day of ruin our practice falls far short of this beautiful picture, let us not lower the standard. One has truly said, "Even if practice may not come up to it, and even if it is impossible to bring saints back to the real standard, let us have the right idea. It is a great thing to get the right idea; but then if we get it, let us expect that the Lord will give grace to walk according to the right idea, in the truth of it, even though you may not’ expect to see things restored to what they were when first established."

9. The Church as the Body of Christ (continued) 1 Corinthians 12:1-31

We have seen that the Church, as the Body of Christ, is viewed in Scripture in a threefold way. First, in the Epistle to the Ephesians, in connection with the counsels of the Father; second, in the Epistle to the Colossians, as the vessel for the display of Christ; third, in 1 Corinthians 12:1-31, as the instrument for the manifestations of the Spirit. In the last chapter we viewed the Body in the first two aspects. It remains to briefly look at the Body in connection with the manifestations of the

Spirit brought before us in 1 Corinthians 12:1-31. The subject, however, of this chapter is not the Body but the Spirit. The Body is introduced as the instrument which the Spirit uses for the display of Christ. The ruin of Christendom has been largely brought about by the loss of all sense of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Clerisy, human organisation, and the adoption of carnal methods have set aside the Holy Spirit. Hence the great importance of this chapter is that it maintains the rights of the Holy Spirit in the Assembly and it rives instruction as to the true character of spiritual manifestations.

Taking a rapid view of the chapter, we first notice in verses 2 and 3 the aim of spiritual manifestations. The great end that the Holy Spirit ever has in view, whatever form the manifestations take is to exalt Christ. He ever leads to the confession of Jesus as Lord. Admitting this, we are at once able to test the spirit by which men speak. It is not a question of distinguishing between a believer and an unbeliever, but of testing the spirit by which men speak. Is it by an evil spirit, or is it by the Spirit of God? If one is speaking by an evil spirit, however learned the speaker, however eloquent the discourse, however apparently moral the tone, in some form or other Christ will be degraded. If one is speaking by the Holy Spirit, however simple the discourse or unlearned the speaker, Christ will be exalted. Apply this test to Unitarians, to Higher Critics, or Modernists, and at once they are exposed, for in different ways all unite in robbing Christ of His glory. But though all who speak by the Holy Spirit exalt Christ, it does not follow that all have the same gift. This leads the apostle in verses 4 to 6 to speak of the diversity of spiritual gifts. The apostle tells us there are diversities of gifts; at the same time we are reminded that diversity of gifts does not sacrifice unity of aim. For the diversity of gifts are controlled by the same Spirit, and thus all lead to the exaltation and expression of Christ (v. 4).

Moreover, the different gifts used by the Spirit have in view different forms of service under the control of one Lord who directs the service (v. 5).

Furthermore the use of the gifts in different services will produce different effects in operations on souls, but it is the same God who works all that is wrought in all (v. 6).

These verses (4-6) rebuke, and at the same time correct much of the grave disorder in Christendom. For the use of gift in Christendom human ability, human wisdom, and a theological training is demanded as a preliminary necessity. No, says the apostle, you require that which no schools of men can give and no human attainments can supply-you require the power and energy of the Holy Spirit. The religious world demands that you must be ordained of men and have the authority of man before ministering to others. No, says the apostle, service according to God requires the authority and direction of the Lord and will endure no rival authority.

Again we are apt to think that by eloquence and moving appeals an impression will be made on the souls of men. No, says the apostle, it is "God which worketh all in all." God worketh everything that is divine in everyone in whom there is a vital work.

Having spoken of diversities of gifts, the apostle in verses 7 to 11, proceeds to speak of the distribution of spiritual manifestations. It is important to notice that it is not simply the gifts that are said to be given but the manifestations of the gifts. That is, the apostle is speaking primarily of the use of the gifts. Hence it is not simply "wisdom" but "the word of wisdom"; not only "knowledge" but "the word of knowledge"; not simply "miracles" but "the working of miracles." Four important truths

are pressed. First, whatever the character of the manifestations and however distributed, all flow from the same Spirit (vv. 8, 9, 10). Thus unity is maintained.

Second, the Spirit distributes the manifestations of the gifts to "every man" (vv. 7, 11). He entirely refuses to concentrate all His manifestations m one man or in a particular class of men. This rebukes that greatest of all disorders in Christendom-the setting apart of a special class of men for the ministry and thus dividing the professing people of God into clergy and laity. Scripture allows of no such distinction. Christendom in its practice contradicts God’s order and says the manifestations of the Spirit are given to one man who presides over the Assembly. No, says the apostle, it is to every man in the Assembly.

Third, the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man "to profit withal." It is given in view of the common good. It is not given for the exaltation or prominence of the individual, for obtaining personal influence or gain, or as a means of livelihood. It is given for profit-spiritual profit.

Fourth, the Spirit distributes the manifestation to every man severally "as He will" (v. 11). This shuts out the will of man. We must then leave room for the Spirit to work according to His will. If we appoint the minister or arrange the ministry, we shall be putting restrictions upon His will by the employment of our wills, and thus hinder the Holy Spirit’s using whom He will.

Having spoken of the distribution of the gifts, and shown that the "working of the gifts is by the Spirit, the apostle proceeds to speak, in verses 12 to 27, of the instrument for spiritual manifestations. This introduces the Body of Christ. It is well to note that the Body is only actually mentioned in verses 13 and 27. In all the other verses the apostle is speaking of the human body as an illustration. Apart from this great truth there can be no intelligent use of gift. For, according to God’s order, the Spirit does not use us as isolated individuals, but as members of the Body of Christ, and for the good of the whole Body. Using the human body as an illustration, the apostle shows that as the human body is one and yet composed of many members, each having a special place and function in the body, "so also is the Christ." This is a striking way of presenting the truth. The subject is the one Body, but the apostle does not say, "so also is the Body of Christ," but "so also is the Christ," because the one Body is viewed under the eye of God as the expression of Christ. This one Body has been formed by the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and it has been truly said that the baptism of the Spirit was not intended to take us to Heaven, but that there might be one Body on earth which should be morally a reproduction of Christ. To enter into the true significance of the one Body we must remember two facts. First, that Christ personally is absent from the world; second, that the Holy Spirit is present in the world. During the time of Christ’s absence, Jewish and Gentile believers have been formed into one Body, by the Holy Spirit, in order that Christ characteristically may be reproduced in His Body-that all that He did in perfection in His body when here-pastoring, teaching, preaching and blessing-may be continued in His spiritual Body now that He is gone. This baptism of the Holy Ghost took place in connection with Jewish believers at Pentecost (see Acts 1:5; Acts 2:1-4); and in reference to Gentile believers at the call of Cornelius and his friends (Acts 10:44; Acts 11:15-17). The baptism of the Spirit involves the setting aside of all that is after the flesh. Natural distinctions, such as Jew or Gentile, and social positions, such as bond or free, have no place in the one Body. We cannot think of ourselves as Jews or Gentiles, or according to any other fleshly distinction, for "by one Spirit are we all baptized into one Body." All forming the one Body have been "made to drink of one Spirit." We enjoy the same

blessings and privileges, for this enjoyment springs from one source-the Holy Spirit. From this point the apostle again takes up the human body to enforce certain practical truths in connection with spiritual manifestations in the one Body. First, he presses that in the Body there is diversity in unity (vv. 14-19). "The Body is not one member but many"; that is, while there is one body there are many members. But this diversity would be entirely lost, and the gravest disorder follow, if each member neglected its own function through envy of members having perhaps a higher function. If the foot began to complain because it was not a hand and the ear complain that it was not an eye, the work of the body would cease, for complaining members cease to work effectually for the good of the body. How then is disorder prevented amongst the many members? By the recognition that it is God who hath "set the members every one of them in the Body as it hath pleased Him." So in the Body of Christ it is God that has given each his appointed place and function, with the result that no member is pre-eminent. The preeminence of one member would do away with the Body altogether. "If they were all one member where were the Body?"

Furthermore the apostle presses the other side of the truth. There is unity in diversity (vv. 20-24). If there are many members, we must remember there is only one Body. but the unity of the Body would be imperilled if the higher members were to look with disdain upon the lower. We have seen that envy of one another would break up the diversity; now we learn that disdain would break up the unity. If the eye treats the hand with contempt, and the head sneers at the feet, all unity of the body would be gone. What meets this danger? Again the recognition of God’s own work. God hath tempered the Body together in such fashion that no member can do without the other. The greatest member requires the least-no, much more those members of the Body which seem to be more feeble are necessary. It is not simply that all work to the common good, but that no one member can properly carry out its functions without the other members- in a word, every member is indispensable.

There are thus two grave dangers that can bring in disorder into the Body. One, discontent on the part of the less prominent members with the place allotted to them; the other, disdain on the part of the more prominent members for those which seem to be more feeble. One breaks up the diversity, the other destroys the unity; both destroy the proper functions of the Body. Bring God in, and in each case the disorder is met. It is God that has given each member his special work, and God has so tempered together the members of the Body that no member is pre-eminent and every member is indispensable. The result of God’s work and wisdom is that the members of the human body have "the same care one for another" (v. 25). Not simply that they "take care of one another," but that they have a mutual interest in one another, so that if "one members suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it." The apostle does not say that this should be so, but that it is so. In the application to the Body of Christ the expression of this truth is greatly hindered by sectarianism and denominational barriers that have been set up by man; but the truth remains that what affects one member affects all members because the members are united to one another by the Holy Spirit, and what depends upon the Spirit abides, however much our failure may hinder its expression. The broken condition of the people of God has lowered our spiritual sensibilities; but the more we are controlled by the Spirit, the deeper will be our realization of this truth. As one has said, "We consciously suffer or rejoice in the measure of our spiritual power." The apostle has been speaking of the human body as the example of the Body of Christ. Now he gives these truths a local application. He says to the

Corinthian saints, "Ye are Body of Christ, and members in particular." He does not say, "Ye are the Body of Christ," as the Authorized translation has it. The Corinthian Assembly was not "the whole Body of Christ," but they were the local expression of the one Body. Such is the privilege and responsibility of the local Assembly. They are "Body of Christ," not independently-which would deny the truth of the one Body-but representatively, which maintains the truth.

Today we could hardly say of any local company of saints, "ye are Body of Christ," for no local company includes all the saints in a given locality: and even did it do so, to assume to be the Body of Christ in the place would be mere pretension. In the beginning, the local Assembly represented what was visibly true of the whole. Today, the Church is in ruin, and any company assuming to De the Body of Christ is pretending to express something that is not true of the professing Church. It would be mere independency. Sadly, in reality, the various communities are locally only the expression of their respective denominations. However, it is still our responsibility to refuse to go on with anything that denies this great truth and our privilege and blessing to walk in the light of it.

10. The Church in a Day of Ruin 2 Timothy 2:1-26 In a former chapter we sought to present the mind of God as to His House. We have also seen that, through the failure of man in responsibility, evil doctrines and evil men have been brought into the House of God, reducing the House to a ruin and exposing it to judgment.

It has been pointed out that while the first Epistle to Timothy presents the House of God in order according to the mind of God, the second Epistle presents the House when it has become ruined by the failure of man, and, in its ruin, likened to "a great house" in which "there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour" (2 Timothy 2:20). The believer who has once seen the truth of the Assembly as the House of God as unfolded in Scripture, may well say, "I see nothing on earth that answers to the truth." How pitiful that this is true! In a day of ruin the truth of the House of God can only be known in an abstract way, there being no longer any concrete expression of the truth. All that can be actually seen in Christendom is "a great House" containing vessels to honour and dishonour. This raises other questions in the mind of the believer who desires to walk in obedience to God: Does the Word of God give any directions for God’s people in a day of ruin? Is there any light as to how we are to walk and with whom we are to walk in a day when Christendom has become corrupt? However great the difficulties or however dark the day, it is not possible to think that God ever leaves His people without sufficient light for their pathway through this world. Through lack of spirituality we may fail to discern the light; through lack of devotedness we may fail to walk according to the light, or through sheer apathy we may be wholly indifferent to it; nevertheless we may be sure that the Word realise, God provides full light for our pathway.

There are three facts of the first importance for our souls to realise, if we desire to walk through this world according to the mind of God.

First, we have to learn that, however great our natural intelligence, however highly the mind may have been trained, however great our knowledge of Scripture, however sincere our desires, we cannot, if trusting to our own minds, find God’s path for His people in the midst of the confusion of Christendom. We are not competent to find our way through the increasing difficulties of the path, to face the continual opposition to the truth, or to solve the various questions that constantly arise.

But, second, having discovered our utter incompetence, we are very greatly relieved to learn that we are not left to find our way as best we can and that God never expected that we should have any wisdom or competence in ourselves to walk according to His mind. The Lord could say, "Without Me ye can do nothing."

Third, it is a very great day when we discover the rich provision that God has made in order that we might be intelligent in His mind. First, we have a Head in Heaven-Christ in glory is the Head of His Body, the Church-and all wisdom is in the Head, so that though we have no wisdom in ourselves, we have full wisdom in Christ. One has truly said, "Christ is made wisdom to us, that is intelligence. He alone could lead men through the perplexities of this world of moral confusion, where there is no way." It is then of the first importance to give up our own "heads" and look to Christ as "the Head" to guide us. If we trust our own heads, we are "not holding the Head" (Colossians 2:19).

Second, the Holy Spirit-a Divine Person-is on earth. The Lord knew well that His people would not be able to support themselves in a world from which he is absent; thus, before He left, He could say, "I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth" (John 14:16-17). The preservation and maintenance of the truth is not dependent upon the saints, but upon the abiding presence of the Spirit of Truth.

Third, we have the Holy Scriptures given by inspiration of God and profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Timothy 3:16-17). We read that "the House of God which is the Assembly of the living God" is "the pillar and base of the truth"; but, when the House of God has become a ruin, and we no longer have the truth livingly set forth in the Church, the man of God still has the infallible authority of Scripture by which to prove all things. Now it must be manifest that no ruin in Christendom can for one moment alter Christ, or the Spirit, or the Scriptures. Christ remains the Head in Heaven, with boundless stores of wisdom for His people to draw upon, as much in these last days as in the first days of Christianity. The Holy Spirit abides with unabated power to guide and control. The Holy Scriptures remain with absolute authority.

Yet Christendom has largely set aside Christ, the Spirit, and the Scriptures. The great religious systems of men have indeed retained the name of Christ, but have set aside Christ as the Head in Heaven by appointing earthly heads. Rome has its Pope; the Greek Church, its Patriarch; the Protestant Churches, their Kings, Archbishops, Presidents or Moderators. Then in these great systems there is little left for the Spirit. The religious machinery and carnal devices of men have largely shut out the Spirit. And, lastly, men have made the most deadly attack upon the Scriptures, until there is hardly a sect in Christendom that holds with any degree of unanimity that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God."

If, then, we desire to give Christ His place as the Head of the Church, to own and submit to the control of the Holy Spirit and to implicitly bow to Scripture, what are we to do? Scripture very definitely answers that we must maintain and act upon two great principles. First, separation from all that is contrary to the truth of God-all that is a denial of the truth of the Church, of Christ as the Head of His Church, of the Holy Spirit as ours all-sufficient guide, and the Scriptures as our absolute authority. Then, after we have separated from evil, Scripture insists upon another equally important principle-association with all that is according to God. In a word, we must "Cease to do

evil; learn to do well."

First, then, let us seek to learn what Scripture has to say as to separation from evil. All would admit, however much we may come short in practice, that separation from this evil world has ever been incumbent upon the people of God, but in a day when Christianity has become corrupted, we have special instructions for a threefold separation. First, separation from every religious system which by its constitution is a denial of the truth of Christ and the Church. The word in Hebrews 13:13, is very plain, "Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach." The camp was the Jewish religious system originally set up by God and making its appeal to the natural man. In it no question of new birth was raised; all depended upon natural birth. It was composed of people outwardly in relationship with God, with an earthly order of priests who stood between the people and God. It had a worldly sanctuary and an ordered ritual (Hebrews 9:1-10). It is only too manifest that the religious systems of Christendom have been formed after the pattern of the camp. They are largely composed of unconverted men; they, too, make a definite appeal to the natural man; they, too, have their worldly sanctuaries, their ritual, and their humanly ordained priests that stand between the people and God. But in imitating the camp, Christians, as we have seen, have set aside Christ as the Head, the Holy Spirit as Guide, and the Scriptures as authority. If, then, we would give Christ His true place we must, in obedience to the Word, "Go forth unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach."

But, second, separation from the camp order of things as set forth in these religious systems is not enough. Scripture also plainly enjoins separation from evil doctrine. In 2 Timothy 2:19, we read, "Let every one that nameth the name of the Lord depart from iniquity." Every one who confesses the name of the Lord is, by profession, identified with the Lord and is responsible to withdraw from iniquity. The iniquity may take many forms, but the preceding verses plainly show that evil doctrines are especially in view. We must not link iniquity with the name of the Lord. It may cost us much in time to separate from iniquity, but it will cost us much more in eternity to link up the name of the Lord with iniquity.

Third, the same Scripture demands separation from evil persons. Verse 20 speaks of vessels to honour and to dishonour, and in the following verse we are enjoined to purge ourselves from the vessels to dishonour in order to be sanctified and meet for the Master’s use. Here it is clear that persons are in view, not merely doctrines. It has been truly remarked: "It is always in proportion to your separation from these vessels-persons, not their doctrines merely, that you are sanctified and meet for the Master’s use.... Few have an idea how one suffers from unhallowed society. It is not enough not to hold their doctrines; but their society contaminates. You are coloured by the lowest company that you keep. Every effort has been tried in Christendom to weaken the force of this passage; every one is great in proportion to his separation."

Thus it is clear that Scripture plainly enjoins separation from religious systems that are a denial of the truth, from false doctrines that undermine the truth, and from vessels to dishonour who do not practice the truth.

This, however, is not enough. Separation, however necessary, is only negative; there must be also that which is positive. This leads us to the second great principle, association with good. Just as separation is to be from evil things as well as evil persons, so, too, the association is to be with things that are right and good as well as with persons who are right with the Lord. We are to

"follow righteousness, faith, love, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:22). Righteousness of necessity stands first. Whatever profession a man may make, if there is not the maintenance of practical righteousness, there cannot be a walk according to God. But righteousness is not enough: mere right and wrong is not sufficient to determine the Christian's path. He must indeed do right, but to take the path of the Lord requires faith. Therefore with righteousness "faith" must be followed. But righteousness and faith make way for "love." If love is not guarded by righteousness and faith, it will degenerate into mere human affection and be used as a plea for the allowance of laxity and the passing over of evil. Then these three qualities lead to "peace." Not a dishonourable peace that is only a compromise with evil, unbelief and hatred; but an honourable peace that is the outcome of righteousness, faith, and love. But if we follow these beautiful qualities, we shall find others who are doing the same-those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart-and with such we are to associate. The fact that they call on the Lord out of a pure heart can plainly be discerned by their practical lives, inasmuch as it can be seen that they have "departed from iniquity," purged themselves from vessels to dishonour, and follow "righteousness, faith, love, peace." It is therefore clear that the path of separation is not a path of isolation. Scripture shows that there will always be those with whom we can associate.

However, those who, in the midst of the corruption of Christendom, take this path of separation from evil and association with good, will have raised against them "foolish and senseless questions" by those who oppose a path that they have not faith to take. To meet such it will be necessary to cultivate a spirit of "gentleness," "patience," and "meekness." Only as we wear this character will it be possible to avoid strife while seeking to instruct (2 Timothy 2:23-26) .

It will be noticed that in these scriptures that give such definite instruction for the people of God in a day of ruin, it is not once suggested that we should go outside the House of God. Indeed, to do so is impossible without going outside Christendom, which would involve leaving the world altogether. But while we cannot go outside the House, we are responsible to separate from the evil in the House. Again, we are not told to reconstruct anything. We are not told to rebuild the House. We are not called to form a pattern Church or to start anything new. We are simply to walk in the light of that which was in the beginning and which still exists under the eye of God in spite of all the failure of man in responsibility. That is to say, it is still our privilege and responsibility to walk in the truth of the Church, in the recognition of Christ as the Head, under the control and guidance of the Holy Spirit, and according to the instructions of Scripture.

S. Some Day.

Some Day.

Some day upon our raptured sight will dawn The perfect day;

Some day will break the bright and cloudless morn When Christ shall say, "Amid the shadows of the desert wide, No longer stay;

Arise my love, my fair, my longed for Bride, And come away."

Some day upon our list’ning ear will fall His voice of love;

Some day He’ll come into the clouds and call His Bride above; With all His own to meet Him in the air To see His face. To pass into those heavenly scenes so fair, And praise His grace.

Some day we’ll be with Christ for ever nigh, No more to stray;

Some day we’ll reach the heavenly home on high.

Perhaps today!

Oh then to join the heavenly host to swell The Saviour’s praise;

Oh then, of His redeeming love to tell, Through endless days.

H. Smith.

S. Suffering and Glory.

Suffering and Glory.

Hamilton Smith.

Luke 9:22-36 very touchingly presents the sufferings of the Son of Man and the glory that shall follow. At the hands of men He was to "suffer many things," to be "rejected" and "slain." Then, on the Mount of Transfiguration we have a passing vision of the glory and honour with which it is the purpose of God to crown the Son of Man. (Psalms 8:1-9). Moreover the passage challenges our hearts, for it clearly shows that if His disciples have the privilege to share in His glory, they are also first called to partake of His sufferings. Thus there passes before us the path and portion of those who follow a rejected Christ in this present evil world; and the glory to which the path leads in the world to come. The Path of Suffering (v. 23-27). The Lord opens His instruction with the words, "If any man will come after Me." Touching words that presume He has gone before and marked out a path for His own, and, drawn by love, that they would seek to tread where He has trod. At the entrance of this path we find these searching words, "Let him deny himself." Men speak of self-denial, and have self-denial weeks, by which they mean denying themselves certain things for a limited period of time to help some benevolent cause. This, however, is the very opposite of denying self, for it rather adds to self-complacency and the exaltation of self. The denial of self is not simply denying ourselves certain things, but the denial of the man that lusts after these. The denial of self is the ignoring of self altogether in order to serve others in love. Such was the path that the Lord ever trod while passing through this world of need. Moreover, as rejected by this world, Christ is in the outside place of reproach, and those who follow Him will find that they too will have to face reproach. Thus the Lord exhorts the one that comes after Him to "take up his cross daily." For the Lord the cross meant not only suffering and shame from the hands of men, but also the far deeper sufferings from the hand of God. He was alone in His sufferings at the hand of a holy God, when made sin; but in His sufferings from men we can in our little measure share, and He has left us the perfect example of such sufferings for we are told to consider Him that "endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of God" (Hebrews 12:2). We are exhorted "To go forth .... unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach." Moreover, this reproach is to be taken up "daily." This is a searching word, for it is comparatively easy to make some great sacrifice on some special occasion, but the "daily" acceptance of the path of reproach and suffering for Christ’s sake in everyday life calls for great grace. But how is it possible to deny self and accept reproach? Only as we have an object that is greater than self before us. Thus the Lord adds the words, "Follow Me." Furthermore, to follow after Christ must mean the letting go of the present life. Whoever, believer or unbeliever, lives only for the present life, is living a life that he must inevitably lose, for at best it is but a passing life. To have Christ before us, is to live a life that will never pass away: — a life that can be enjoyed now, but will only be known in all its fulness in life’s eternal home. Lastly, it is impossible to follow Christ and at the same time walk with the world and seek its advantages. Paul, with Christ as his life, could say, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." Even for the unbeliever what

advantage is there in gaining the whole world for a few fleeting years and then to be lost for eternity? For the believer to associate with the world and seek its advantages and honours must mean the loss of all present joy in the Lord, the end of all testimony for the Lord, and the forfeiture of His approval in the day "When He shall come in His own glory and in His Father's, and of the holy angels." Thus to follow truly a rejected Christ will mean, as to this present world, the refusal of self, the reproach of men, the loss of the present life with the world and its advantages. The Coming Glory (v. 28-36). The path of reproach and loss of present things involves suffering for the flesh. But the suffering is only for a season, the eternal weight of glory is on before. The Lord would impress our souls with a sense of this glory by unfolding before us the blessedness, as well as the moral traits of the home of glory that lies at the end of the path of suffering. To enter into these heavenly things we must have our spirits lifted above this present world; therefore we read, "He went up into a mountain." Amidst all the sorrows of this world, and the heart-breaking trials amongst the people of God, is it not a joy to be lifted above things seen and heard, and, in spirit on the mountain top, catch a glimpse by faith of the coming glory? It cheers and calms the spirit as we pass through this dark valley to see the sunlight on the hills beyond.

Having ascended the mountain the first great sight that passes before the disciples is a praying Man, for we read, "He prayed." Prayer is the expression of dependence upon God, and communion with God. The sorrows of earth can be traced back to the disobedience and independence of one man — Adam. The glories of the world to come are introduced by the perfect obedience and dependence of one Man — Christ. The world to come will be a world of bliss, for there everyone will be dependent upon God. Good for us to go up "into the mountain" to spread everything before God, so that we may come down "into the plain" to do everything for God, while we wait for the coming of Christ. Thus Jude, in his Epistle, links prayer with the coming of Christ, when he exhorts us to be found "praying in the Holy Spirit" while "looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."

(1) In this great scene we learn the change that will pass upon the saints when Jesus comes. We see set forth in Christ the image of the heavenly that we shall wear in the coming glory; "As we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly" (1 Corinthians 15:49). Thus, as He prayed, the disciples saw in the Person of Christ the earthly changed into the heavenly. Peter, writing of this great scene, can say, "We made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Mark the word "power." Peter, says as it were, "We not only foretold but we have seen what would happen when He comes. We saw Him as a lowly Man, and behold, in an instant, the garments of humiliation were exchanged for garments of glory; and His face that was more marred than any man's became shining as the sun. We saw in Him the mighty power, that in 'the twinkling of an eye' will change these bodies of humiliation into bodies of glory like His own." (2) It is brought home to us in the mount that, in the coming glory, we shall not only be like Him, but we shall be with Him, for, we read, "Behold, there talked with Him two men." He will not be alone in the glory. He will have companions; though truly He will be anointed with the oil of gladness above His companions. In such a scene of glory we might have expected to see Him surrounded by a host of angels, but His companions will be men. They are men for whom He died; whom He is bringing home to glory; and men that will share with Him in His glory as the Son of Man. In heaven there will be "No more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain"; but the greatest joy of all will be that we shall be "with Him" — we shall be with

JESUS. Thus, the great passage in which the Apostle Paul tells us that we shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, concludes with the words, "So shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:17). (3) We learn that, not only shall we be with Him in the glory, but we shall be at home in the glory, for we read of these two men that they "talked with Him." Had it been written merely that He talked with them, we might judge that in the glory we shall be delighted but silent listeners. If, however, they can talk with Him, all distance and reserve will be gone. The disciples had indeed held sweet intercourse with Christ on earth, howbeit, at times, with a measure of restraint. In the glory there will be holy happy intercourse without a trace of reserve. Blessed, indeed, that He can come to two disciples on the resurrection day and, in their sorrowful wilderness circumstances they can say He made "our hearts burn within us, while He talked with us by the way." But how far more wonderful is this scene in which He brings two saints to talk with Him in glory. (4) Not only shall we be like Him, and with Him, but we shall share His glory, for we read of these two men, they "appeared in glory." They share in the glory of Christ as the glorified Man. So we read of believers, "When Christ who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory" (Colossians 3:4). It is no great hardship to let go the passing glories of this world, and accept the path of suffering, when we know that we are going to share in the glories of Christ in the world to come. (5) They "spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem." A little later two other disciples, treading a dreary road to Emmaus, speak of His decease as accomplished by men, for they say, "The chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to death, and have crucified Him." No wonder they were sad, for all they could see in the death of Christ was that which brings judgment upon man. But here, on the Mount, two men lose sight of man and his wickedness, and they see only Jesus and the death "which He should accomplish." They see in His death the perfect setting forth of His obedience to the Father in carrying out the Father’s will by offering Himself without spot to God. Thus they see in His death what brings glory to God and opens the way of blessing for men. How good to ascend the Mount, and rising above all the wickedness of men, and the failure of the saints, to see that transcendent love that led the Lord to give Himself, and find rest in that death which He accomplished. Even so in the day of the coming glory the assembled host of the redeemed will still speak of the death which He has accomplished, for the language of the new song will be, "Thou hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood." (6) In this great scene we are carried in spirit beyond the Kingdom glory into what speaks of the Father’s house. We read, there "came a cloud and overshadowed them." The death which Christ accomplished not only opens the way for believers to share the Kingdom glories of Christ, but enables them to enter in company with Christ into the immediate presence of God the Father, of which the cloud speaks. Peter, in his Epistle, speaks of the glory that excels, for he says, "there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory." There is the glory of the earthly kingdom, but there is the more excellent glory — the glory of the Father’s presence in the Father’s house. The disciples had seen the glory of the Son of Man. But there is another glory — a greater glory — a glory of which the Lord speaks in His prayer when He asks, "That they may behold my glory." We share in His glory as the Son of Man; we shall behold His glory as the Son of God. (7) In this more excellent glory we are permitted to hear the Father express His delight in the Son, for we hear the voice from the excellent glory, saying, "This is my beloved Son: hear Him." The voice does not say, This is my Son that you ought to love, but, This is my Son that I love. We are taken into the Father’s house, there to have fellowship with the Father in His delight in the Son.

Thus there passes before us the blessed portion that will be ours when Jesus comes. We shall be like Him: we shall be with Him; we shall be at home with Him; we shall share His kingdom glory; we shall delight not only to share it all, but owe it all to Him, for we shall speak of His decease; we shall be taken beyond the Kingdom glories, to enter the more excellent glory of the Father’s house, there to know and enjoy the Father’s delight in the Son. Moreover, as we journey on to be with Christ in glory, let us ever remember that we have the Lord with us in our wilderness path. Thus we read, "When the voice was past, Jesus was found alone." The vision passes, Moses and Elias depart, the cloud fades, the voice is silent, but JESUS remains. As we take our journey through this world with all its trials and sorrows, He is with us according to His own promise, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Loving us unto the end, He will be with us until the end when we are with Him to go no more out and the blessings of the Mount will be our eternal portion.

S. The Addresses to the Seven Churches.

The Addresses to the Seven Churches.

Hamilton Smith.

Preface. The following pages contain a simple exposition of the Addresses to the Seven Churches, in which it is sought to trace the decline of the professing Church, from its departure from first love, until the solemn moment is reached when it will be spued out of Christ’s mouth. Further, it seeks to set forth the Lord’s mind as to the Church, in responsibility, at each stage, in order that the consciences of His people may be exercised by His warnings, while their hearts are cheered by His words of encouragement.

H. S.

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(V l). In commencing to study the last book of the Bible it is at once evident, from the introductory verses, that we are about to read a Book of Judgment, and that every truth is presented in perfect consistency with this solemn subject.

Viewed as a whole the Book is declared to be "the Revelation;" a term which implies the unfolding of truth which otherwise would be unknown. Moreover, it is "the Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him." Thus Christ is here viewed, as indeed throughout the Book, in His perfect Manhood, though as ever, there will be found statements that guard, and maintain His Deity. Bearing in mind that the Revelation is the Book of Judgment, preparing the way for Christ to inherit the earth, it will at once be seen how suitably Christ is presented in His Manhood; for it is as Man that Christ is ordained to be the Judge, and as Man He will inherit all created things (John 5:27; Acts 17:31; Psalms 8:4-8).

Further, the Revelation was given to Christ "to shew unto His servants." Thus believers are not viewed in their relationship to the Father as sons, but in relation to Christ as servants. This again is perfectly intelligible when we remember that the Book does not unfold the privileges of sons, as we find in the Epistles, but rather expresses the judgment of the Lord upon the way those who profess to be believers have exercised their responsibilities as servants.

Moreover, we learn from the introduction, that the great purpose of Christ in the Revelation is "to shew unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass." The contents of the Book make perfectly clear that these things are the judgments that are shortly coming upon Christendom, and the world at large. These judgments are made known, not to gratify curiosity, or feed the fleshly mind in its craving for the sensational, but in order that the servants of Christ, being warned of coming judgment, may walk in holy separation from an unholy and judgment-doomed world. The Revelation, as with all other communications from God, is given to produce a present moral effect upon the hearers. It is not merely communicated but "signified;" a term that implies a communication accompanied by visible signs, thus preparing us for the visions of the Book.

John, who receives these communications, is viewed, not as the disciple that Jesus loved, with his head upon the bosom of Jesus, sharing the intimate thoughts of His heart, nor even as an Apostle sent to others to communicate the thoughts of love, but as a servant responsible to his Master.

(V. 2). Having received these communications John passes them on to others. He "bare record of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ." The Revelation comes with all the authority of the Word of God. At the same time-it is the testimony of Jesus: not a testimony to Jesus, however much it may contain truths which do indeed testify to Jesus. The testimony of Jesus is that which He Himself renders as to things which must shortly come to pass, — things which John saw (compare Revelation 22:8).

(V. 3). The introductory verses conclude with a special blessing for the one who reads, and for those that hear the words of this prophecy, if the reading and hearing is accompanied by keeping the things which are written therein. This keeping implies a subjection to these words that will affect our practical conduct. This will indeed make demands upon us, but, as ever, the path of submission will be one of great gain, even though it be one of self-denial. The whole Revelation is here referred to as a prophecy, definitely showing that even the addresses to the Seven Churches have a prophetic character.

Finally, we are reminded that "the time is at hand." The servant is not to expect any further revelation, but to walk with patience in the light of the Revelation of things shortly to come to pass, knowing that "the time is at hand."

(Vv. 4-6). Following upon the introductory verses we have the salutation of the Apostle from which we learn that the record John bears takes the form of a letter addressed to the Seven Churches in the Roman province of Asia. The greeting is characteristic of the Book. Grace and peace is toward the Churches, not as being composed of children in relation with the Father, but, of servants on earth in connection with the throne of government. Thus God is seen according to the name of Jehovah that He takes in connection with Israel and the earth; the One who is, and who was, and who is to come. Further, the Spirit is viewed in His fulness as the seven Spirits before Jehovah’s throne; setting forth, doubtless, the fulness of the Spirit ready to be "sent forth into all the earth," as

we learn from Revelation 5:6. Have we not in Isaiah 11:2, an intimation of this sevenfold perfection of the Spirit in connection with Christ, the fruitful Branch from the root of Jesse? There we read, "The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD."

So, also, Christ is presented in connection with the government of the earth. He is "the faithful Witness;" the One who perfectly set forth God on earth. He is the first begotten from the dead; the One who broke the power of death on earth. He, too, is "the Prince of the kings of the earth;" the One who will rule over all that rule over the earth.

How blessed that the Persons of the Godhead, who are here seen in connection with the government of the earth, — controlling, guiding and judging, — secure grace and peace to the churches, or servants, while they are yet in the scene that is under judgment. This salutation immediately calls forth a glad response from the Church. John, representing the Church, says, "Unto Him that loves us and has washed us from our sins in His blood, and hath made us a kingdom and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be the glory and the dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (N. Tr.). The love is viewed as a present reality, as that which remains, though the work by which it has been so perfectly expressed is finished. It is a measureless love, for who can estimate the value of the blood by which the love has been set forth? By the precious blood believers have been washed from their sins, and are thus assured, as they open the Book of Judgment, that they themselves are beyond the judgment.

Moreover, not only are believers washed from their sins, but, as washed, they are made a kingdom. Does this not suggest a company of people who are in subjection to God to do His will, and not, as in time past, their own wills? (Comp. 1 Peter 4:2-3).

Further, believers are viewed as priests unto God, and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and as such have access to God for intercession and praise. This response to the glory of Jesus Christ closes with a burst of praise to the Lord, "To Him be the glory and the might to the ages of ages. Amen."

How beautiful is this presentation of the Church in its privileges. Loved by Christ; washed by His precious blood; subject to God; having access to the Father, and praising the Lord Jesus — a loved people, a cleansed people, an obedient people, a priestly people, and a praising people. When we come to the addresses to the Seven Churches, which present the Church in its responsibilities, we learn how solemnly the Church has failed to answer to its privileges. Truly there are two Churches, Smyrna and Philadelphia, in which the Lord finds nothing to condemn, nevertheless, in the other five Churches there is a serious departure from the normal privileges of the Church as set forth in this fine burst of praise. In Ephesus there was the departure from the love of Christ. In Pergamos, instead of a condition suited to those who have been washed in the blood of the Lamb. unholiness is tolerated. In Thyatira, instead of a kingdom where all are subject to the Lord, the Church assumes the place of rule. In Sardis, there is a name to live before men, but death before the Lord. The place of priests before God is lost. In Laodicea’ instead of exalting the Lord, and ascribing to Him all glory and dominion, the Church exalts itself and practically ignores Christ.

(V. 7). This outburst of praise is followed by a testimony to Jesus Christ. John has greeted the Churches, bringing Christ before them in His glory, and drawing a bright response from them. Now he hails the One who is coming to earth as the Judge. "Behold,'' says he, "He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see Him, and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him." This is not indeed the hope of the Church, but the testimony of the Church. The Church will not wail when it is caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Then, indeed, for the Church all tears will be wiped away. For the world, however, that has rejected Christ, and scoffed at His coming, it will be a time of wailing, when "the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him."

(V. 8). To this testimony the Lord, Himself, responds: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, saith the Lord, He who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." The coming Judge is the Alpha and the Omega; as another has truly said, "whose word is the beginning and end of all speech: all that can be said is said when He has spoken." At the beginning His word brought all things into being, and in the end, His word "It is done," will fix their eternal state.

Moreover He is the Lord God — Jehovah, as it has been said, "The covenant keeping God, unchangeable amid all changes, true to His threats and to His promises alike."

He, too, is the Almighty — the One with irresistible power, able to carry out His threats and fulfil His promises. The Vision of The Son of Man.

Revelation 1:9-18. The vision of the Son of Man, in His dignity as the Judge, is introductory to the messages which give His judgment on the Seven Churches. We do well to linger over the vision, for it is the greatness of the Speaker that gives value to His words. Thus the deeper our sense of the glory of the One who speaks, the more heed shall we give to that which He utters.

(Vv. 9, 10). Before we see the vision of Christ, we learn that such sights call for special circumstances; they require a suited condition of soul, and their appropriate season. Thus it is that John finds himself in circumstances of trial, and, though truly in the kingdom as subject to Christ, yet not in the kingdom and glory, but, in the kingdom and patience in Jesus. Furthermore he is banished to the barren Isle of Patmos. If, however, he is banished to some desolate spot by the decrees of man, it is that, withdrawn from every other influence, he may receive the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. How often, in the history of God’s people, times of trial have become seasons of spiritual illumination. As another has pointed out, Joseph must go to the prison to become a Revealer of secrets: David must be driven into the dens of the earth to sing his sweetest songs: Paul must suffer imprisonment to receive his highest revelations; and John must go to his Patmos prison to hear words, and see visions, that mortal had never heard nor seen before.

John is not in this lonely spot as a self-exiled anchorite, embittered against the world; but an outcast for whom the world has no use. Though withdrawn from the Lord’s people, he can still speak of himself as their "brother and companion in tribulation," and the Lord makes the loneliness of Patmos an occasion for John to serve others in love.

Moreover, John was not only in the suited place to receive the Revelation, he was also in a suited condition, for he can say, "I became in the Spirit." This would indicate something more than the fact that he was in the normal and proper condition of the believer, as in the Spirit, according to Romans 8:9. It would rather set forth a special condition in which the Apostle was so completely in the power of the Spirit as to be oblivious to all but the wondrous vision, and communications, he was about to see and hear.

Further, the Revelation was given to the Apostle at a special time. It was on "the Lord's day." This term must not be confounded with "the day of the Lord," an expression found in the prophets, and used by the Apostles Paul and Peter, to signify the day when the Lord will suddenly come as a thief in the night to execute judgment (1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:2; 2 Peter 3:10). Obviously the things which are described in Revelation 2:1-29 and Revelation 3:1-22, and the greater part of "the things that are about to be after these things," do not take place in the day of the Lord. There would be no meaning in the Apostle being carried in spirit to the day of the Lord to see things that must take place a couple of thousand years before that day. Thus it seems clear that the Lord's day is the resurrection day, referred to in other Scriptures as the first day of the week. It is called the Lord's day to indicate that it is not a common day; as, indeed, the Lord's Supper is so called to distinguish it from a common meal. It is a day specially set apart, not by a legal command, as in the case of the Jewish Sabbath, but as a special privilege for the worship and service of the Lord.

Thus it is in a place withdrawn from the world, in a suited condition — in the Spirit; and on a special occasion — the Lord's Day, John is arrested by a great voice, as a trumpet, in order to see these wondrous visions, and hear these solemn communications.

(V. 11). What John sees he is told to write in a book and send unto the seven Churches. Already the Apostle has sent greetings to the seven Churches, now they are designated by name. Only seven Churches are addressed; nevertheless, the Spirit of God has selected the written, rather than the oral, form of communication so that the whole Church, for all time, may benefit by these communications.

(Vv. 12, 13). John turns to see the One that spake with him, and at once we have the first great division of the Book, referred to by the Lord as "the things which thou hast seen" (19). John is first arrested by the vision of seven golden candlesticks. A little later we learn that the candlesticks represent seven Churches. The symbol of a candlestick would at once suggest that they represent the Church in its responsibility to maintain a light for Christ in this dark world. The gold would signify that the Church in its beginning on earth was set up in suitability to the Divine glory as a witness for Christ. Moreover it is surely the professing Church that is in view, for later we learn there is the possibility of the candlestick being removed, and finally that which the candlestick represents becoming wholly nauseous to Christ.

Further, John sees, in the midst of the seven candlesticks, one like the Son of Man. This we know is a vision of Christ as about to judge, for all judgment is committed to the Son of Man that He may be honoured in the very nature in which He has been despised and rejected by men. Nevertheless He is spoken of as One like the Son of Man, indicating that He is a Divine Person who has become flesh.

Here Christ is not presented as in the midst of the Assembly to lead the praises of His people; nor in the midst of two or three to guide their prayers. Neither is He viewed as the One Shepherd to unite the sheep into one flock, nor as the Head of the Church — His body. He is seen in the solemn aspect of the Judge in the midst of the Christian profession. He is walking (Revelation 2:1) in the midst of the Assemblies, observing their condition and passing sentence, whether of commendation or censure. Every feature by which He is described is in accord with His character as Judge. His garment is not girded for the service of grace and love, as in the glad day yet to come when His servants will be gathered home and He " shall gird Himself, and make them sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them" (Luke 12:37). Here the Lord is seen in "a garment reaching to the feet," as befitting the dignity of the Judge. Moreover He is "girt about at the breasts with a golden girdle" indicating that the affections are held in by every consideration to the Divine glory.

(Vv. 14-16). "His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow." These symbols, as we know from Daniel 7:9, set forth the glory of God as the Judge upon His throne. Thus we learn that the Son of Man, Himself, possesses the characteristics of the Ancient of Days seen in the vision of Daniel. In due time He will come forth crowned with many crowns: here there is no crown, for the reigning time is not yet come. The judgment throne must precede the Kingdom glories. He must first clear the scene of all evil as the Judge, before He reigns in glory as the King.

"His eyes were as a flame of fire;" setting forth the searching character of that gaze from which nothing can be hid.

"His feet like unto fine brass as if they burned in a furnace," speaking of the inflexible holiness of walk, that never turns to any crooked way, and is undefiled by any soil of earth.

"His voice as the sound of many waters," expresses the power of His word that no man can resist.

"He had in His right hand seven stars." All subordinate authority, as represented by the stars, is under His control, and maintained by His power.

"Out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword." Everything is judged by His infallible word, a sword with two edges that deals not only with outward conduct, but is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart (Hebrews 4:12-13).

"His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength," a symbol that implies that, as the Judge, He is invested with supreme authority.

(Vv. 17, 18). The effect of this great vision of the Son of Man, as the Judge, is so overwhelming that even an Apostle falls at His feet as dead. John had known Christ in His humiliation in the days of His flesh, and had once reposed his head on His bosom; he had seen the vision of Christ in His kingdom glories on the Mount; he had communed with Christ in His glorified body in resurrection; but never before had he seen Christ in His dignity as the Judge. Yet, be it remembered, this is the attitude that Christ takes toward professing Christendom. It is true that as believers we know Him as our Saviour: as members of His body we know Him as our Head; as servants we know Him as our Lord; nevertheless, as connected with the great Christian profession, we have to do with Him as Judge of all our Assembly ways. As we say, the believer knows Him in other and more privileged ways; but the great mass of the Christian profession — composed of mere professors —

can only know Him as the Judge. The mass may profess to honour Him by erecting magnificent temples for His worship, and doing great works in His Name; if, however, they caught but a glimpse of His glory they would find He is walking in the midst of the profession as a Judge, and they would fall at His feet as dead. For John, a "brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience in Jesus," it was far otherwise. There was no need for his fears. The Lord's touch, and the Lord's voice, recall John to the Jesus so well known in the days of His humiliation, whose voice he had so often heard uttering these peace giving words, "Fear not." The One who is the Judge — the first and the last — is the One who had been into death, and is now living for evermore. Everything that would cause the believer — represented by John — to shrink before the Judge, humbled as he ever must be in the consciousness of failure in his witness, has been borne and for ever removed by the death of the One who is going to judge. The keys of death and of Hades are in His hand. The believer then need have no fear, for those keys cannot be used apart from the One who loves us and has died for us. As one has said, our Lord "is the absolute Master of all that might threaten man, whether for the body or the soul." The Messages to the Churches.

Revelation 1:19-20.

Verse 19. The last two verses of the first chapter form a fitting introduction to the Lord's messages to the seven Churches. The fears of the Apostle having been dispelled, he is instructed to commit to writing the things which he had seen, the things which are, and the things that are about to be after these.

Here, then, we have the Lord's own division of the Revelation. First "the things which thou hast seen," referring to the vision of the Son of Man as the Judge (Revelation 1:9-18): second, "the things which are," comprising the addresses to the Seven Churches, representing things which then existed, and the condition that will continue to exist during the Church period (Revelation 2:1-29, Revelation 3:1-22): thirdly, "the things that are about to be after these," embracing the great prophetic events that will take place after the Church period is closed (Rev. 4-22).

(V. 20). As a necessary introduction to the Messages to the Churches, the Lord explains the mystery of the seven stars and the seven golden candlesticks. It is revealed that the seven stars are the angels of the seven Churches, and the seven candlesticks are the seven Churches. The angels of the Churches would appear to represent those who are set in the Assemblies to give heavenly light, even as the stars, which are the symbols of the angels, give light in the heavens. But, like the stars in relation to the light of the sun, they are subordinate light-givers under Christ. The sun is the great and supreme source of light for the whole earth. The stars are needed when the sun is away; and the minor light they emit is of the same character and nature as the light of the sun. In Christ's personal absence the perfection of the Church's witness would be to emit the same character of light as Christ in heavenly glory — the same in quality, though so far removed in volume. In a special way the angels of the Churches are responsible to Christ for the moral condition of the Assemblies, for while the Assemblies as a whole are responsible for their condition, yet the state of the Assemblies would largely depend on the character of ministry they receive.

While in each Church the Lord addresses the Angel, and thus holds the Angel responsible for the state of the Assembly, yet it is noticeable that He constantly passes from speaking directly to the Angel in order to address the Church. Thus in the Pergamos address He speaks of a faithful

martyr "who was slain among you;" and again He says, in the Smyrna address "the devil shall cast some of you into prison." This change from the singular to the plural makes it impossible to apply the Angel to an individual presiding officer, and obliges us to see a symbolical representative of the Church. The seven candlesticks are symbols of the Seven Churches. It is plain from Revelation 1:4, Revelation 1:11, that seven actually existing Churches in the province of Asia are indicated. It is, however, equally plain that these Churches present the history of the whole Church period. Seven actual Asiatic Churches were selected in which were found moral traits which have been used by Christ to prophetically set forth the moral condition of the professing Church as a whole, or in part, at different periods of its history.

There are substantial reasons for this conclusion. In the first place, in Revelation 1:3, the whole book of the Revelation is spoken of as prophecy. This would give a prophetic character to these addresses. Then the number seven is a constant symbol in Scripture of completeness, and, as the seven Spirits speak of the fulness of the one Holy Spirit, so, we judge, the seven Churches present a complete view of the varied conditions of the whole Christian profession. Perhaps, however the most convincing argument for the prophetic character of the Churches is, as one has said, "the real correspondence between the picture given of the seven Churches and the well known history of the professing Church." To profit by the addresses to the Seven Churches it is not only necessary to see their prophetic character, but also, of the first importance, to keep in view the particular aspect in which the Lord is viewed in relation to the Church, as well as the aspect in which the Church is viewed in relation to Christ. The Church is viewed not as the Body, of which Christ is the Head in heaven, and into which nothing that is unreal can come, but as an external body of people on earth professing the Name of Christ, and which may, and in fact does, include a vast profession without life. This profession has taken the Name of Christ, whether His or not; and having done so is responsible to walk according to the order of God’s house, and thus represent on earth the Christ who is in heaven, in all His love, faithfulness and holiness — in a word to be a light for Christ on earth. It would be impossible to speak of the Church as the Body of Christ being rejected by Christ. That, however, which professes to be the Church will finally become so nauseous to Christ that it will be spued out of His mouth, when that which is real — the Body of Christ — has been caught away.

Moreover, let us remember that Christ is not here viewed as the Head of His Body, giving gifts and ministering grace to the Body, and revealing the heavenly privileges of the saints as in the Epistle to the Ephesians. He is not instructing the Assemblies in the principles of Church order, and discipline, as in the Epistles to the Corinthians. Nor is the Lord even instructing the faithful how to act in a day of ruin, as in the second Epistle to Timothy. Here the Lord is presented as walking in the midst of the Christian profession in His character as Judge, with eyes as a flame of fire, searching into the condition of that which professes His Name, and enquiring how far the Churches have answered to, or departed from, their heavenly privileges; how far they have carried out, or failed in, their responsibilities to maintain divine order, and obey divine instructions. Further, having searched into the condition of the Churches, the Lord passes sentence on what He finds, approving what is right and condemning all that is contrary to Himself; warning as regards the evil, and giving encouragement to the overcomer.

It may further help us to understand the prophetic character of these addresses to briefly indicate the different periods of Church history that appear to be set forth by the seven addresses. The

address to the angel of the Church in Ephesus, clearly sets forth the condition of the Church in its first decline during the latter days of the last Apostle, and the years immediately following his decease. The address to the Church in Smyrna would seem to set forth the condition of the Church, as a whole, during the period of the persecutions from the heathen world. In the address to the Church in Pergamos, we have the condition of the Church, as a whole, when the persecutions of the heathen gave way to the patronage of the world. The address to the Church in Thyatira sets forth the condition of the Church as seen by God when, instead of being patronised by the world, the Church sought to become the ruler of the world. The greatest expression of this condition being seen in the Papacy. This condition while ceasing, after a time, to represent the whole Christian profession, continues to the end of the Church period. In the address to the Church in Sardis we see the condition into which a part of the Christian profession falls as the outcome of the Reformation being corrupted by man. It is a condition that develops out of Thyatira, and in opposition to Thyatira, though co-existing with Thyatira to the end. In the address to the Church in Philadelphia there is presented a faithful remnant, apart from the corruption of Thyatira, and the deadness of Sardis, that continues to the end. In the last address, to the Church in Laodicea, there is presented the final phase of the Christian profession, in which the condition is so wholly nauseous to Christ that it ends in the great unreal mass of the Christian profession being spued out of His mouth.

It will also help, in the interpretation of the addresses, to notice that there is a division between the first three and the last four Churches. This is marked by the fact that in the first three Churches the appeal to the one that has an ear to hear, precedes the promise to the overcomer; in the last four addresses it comes after the promise. Again in the first three addresses there is no mention of the coming of the Lord, whereas in the fourth, fifth, and sixth addresses the coming of the Lord is definitely held out as a hope, or a warning. Furthermore, in the last four addresses we see a faithful remnant distinguished in the midst of the increasing corruption.

These differences can be explained by the fact that the first three Churches set forth the state of the whole Church during the first three successive periods of its existence upon earth, conditions which have passed away: whereas the last four represent distinct phases of the Christian profession that do not supersede one another, but exist at the same time, and continue until the Lord comes. In the first three addresses, representing the condition of the Church as a whole, the one with the hearing ear is to be found in the Church as whole. In the last four the Church, as a whole, has broken up and the condition so deteriorated that those who hear what the Spirit has to say will only be found among the overcomers, and therefore the appeal comes after the promise to the overcomer. In the first three addresses there is the call to repentance and the possibility of the Church returning to its original condition. In the last four the condition is such that this is no longer set before the Churches as a possibility; therefore the coming of the Lord is held out as the only hope of the godly remnant.

Thus it becomes clear that the last four Churches are distinguished from the first three by three definite facts: (1) a faithful remnant is distinguished from the corrupt mass; (2) the coming of the Lord is set before the Churches; (3) the one who hears is only found among the overcomers. As to the structure of the Addresses there is a similarity in the way in which the truth is presented in each address. Each address opens with a presentation of Christ in a character which, if it had been apprehended or kept in mind, would have preserved from the state into which the Church

had fallen, or which — in such a state — would sustain the faith of the godly in their testings. This is followed by the assertion of the Lord's perfect knowledge of the condition of each Church leading to His approval or condemnation of what He finds. Then we have special warnings and words of encouragement. Finally each address closes with a special promise to the overcomer.

Ephesus.

Revelation 2:1-7.

Through the extended ministry of the Apostle Paul, the Assembly at Ephesus had probably enjoyed privileges unequalled by any Assembly before or since. It may well be for this reason that this is the first Assembly upon which the Lord passes His judgment. To this Assembly the Apostle Paul had declared all the counsel of God. To these Ephesian saints he had unfolded the love of Christ — the love that passeth knowledge, and led them into their bridal relations with Christ. At Ephesus he had uttered his warnings as to the coming scattering of the saints after his departure, and there he exhorted the elders to take heed to themselves.

These privileges and warnings should have led the saints to shine for Christ in a dark world, while taking heed to themselves and watching against decline. The greater the privilege the greater the responsibility. Thus the Assembly that had privileges above all others, is the first to pass under the searching gaze of the Lord; and they were to discover that they to whom the highest truth had been ministered, were the Assembly in which decline commenced. The highest truth — the love of Christ to the Church — was the truth they failed to maintain. They did not, according to the exhortation of the Apostle, take heed to themselves. Of old the wise man had said, "Keep thy heart more than anything that is guarded" (Proverbs 4:23, N. Tr.). Alas! while outwardly correct in conduct, they failed to guard the heart. They left their first love.

We must however remember that the condition of this first Assembly, sets forth the spiritual condition of the whole Assembly, under the eye of Christ, in the latter part of the life of the last Apostle, and, probably, the period immediately following his death. It thus gives us the mind of Christ as to the decline of the Assembly, as a whole, from its true place and character as a witness for Christ in this world.

(V. 1). The address is "unto the angel of the Assembly." It would seem that the angel represents those who are set to give heavenly light in each Assembly. Even as a star emits its light during the absence of the sun, so the angels (which are likened to stars) are representative of the absent Christ, to bring heavenly truth to the Assembly, which, as a whole, is responsible to be a light for Christ in the world. Thus it follows that the angel, in a special sense, is held responsible for the condition of the Assembly. The Lord presents Himself to this Assembly as, "He that holdeth the seven stars in His right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks." The angels, who directly represent Christ in the Assembly, are here seen in their proper place of dependence upon the Lord. They are held in His right hand, indicating that they carry out their ministry under the direct authority and power of Christ. At this early period of the Church's history the time had not come when those, who are responsible to give heavenly light, take themselves out of the hand of Christ, to receive their authority from the hand of man.

Moreover the Lord is seen, not only in the midst of the candlesticks as in the vision seen by John, but as One "who walketh" in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. He is seen not as an

onlooker but, as moving in the midst of the Assemblies, taking a deep and active interest in the condition of His people, who are viewed as the divinely appointed lightbearers to shine for Himself in this world.

(V. 2). After this introductory presentation of the Lord, the address opens with the words, "I know." These are searching words that speak of the Assemblies being under the gaze of One from whom no secrets can be hid. We are limited in our knowledge, and therefore often partial in our judgments. The Lord knows all that is of Himself and all that is contrary to Himself, though often unknown to others. There was nothing in this Assembly that the world could take account of as being inconsistent with the Christian profession; nevertheless the Lord knew what was lacking. "I know" are encouraging words for the heart, though searching words for the conscience. As ever, the Lord speaks first of things that have His approval, and in this Assembly there was much in accord with His mind. First the Lord says, "I know thy works." These surely were works of which the Lord could approve, for there was in this Assembly much devoted activity in the service of the Lord.

Then the Lord commends the "labour" that marked their works. There may be much service and yet little labour in the service. The word indicates that energy, and real toil, were involved in their service. It cost these saints an expenditure of labour.

Further, the Lord finds patience, or "endurance," of which He can approve. Their service was not marked by mere human energy that ofttimes expends itself in a great outburst of activity. It was marked by that quiet endurance that continues in the Lord’s work in the face of all hindrances, discouragements, and even opposition.

Moreover, the Lord can say with approval, "Thou canst not bear them which are evil." They refused to tolerate, or compromise with, evil, nor would they give countenance to the persons who compounded with it.

Again, the Lord commends them for the firmness and boldness that refused to receive people on their own commendation. Whatever profession people made, even to the pretension of being apostles, they tested, and refused such as were found to be liars.

(V. 3). Finally, the Lord delights to witness to their true, and devoted, love for Himself. Their endurance; their suffering; their unwearied labour, was for the name of Christ. It was not to make a name for themselves, but in love for His name.

How beautiful are these qualities that the Lord singles out for His approval; and well, indeed, that those who seek to be a light for Christ in this dark world should covet such excellent traits, and seek to possess them in combination; for each characteristic tempers the other. The "works," that the Lord approves, are kept by "toil" from becoming merely languid works taken up in a casual way. The "endurance" keeps the toil from being only a passing outburst of fervour. The hatred of evil prevents the patience from degenerating into tolerance of evil. The testing of profession, and exposure of pretension, proved their hatred of evil to be not mere lip profession, that ended in protest without any action against the evil. Moreover, doing all for Christ’s name, proved that their works, their toil, their endurance, and their dealing with evil, was not simply to make, or preserve their own religious reputation. It was for Christ’s sake.

(V. 4). It is thus evident that there was very much in the Assembly at Ephesus that met with the Lord's unqualified approval; and the Lord does not withhold His approval because of any defect that He may see. Nevertheless, He does not refrain from exposing the defect because of so much that He can approve. Under His eye there was in this Assembly decline, and that of a serious nature. In spite of much that the Lord approves He has to say, "Nevertheless I have against thee, that thou hast left thy first love." The word "somewhat" is a serious and unwarranted interpolation. It would give the wrong impression that to leave first love is a small matter in the eyes of the Lord. It was, on the contrary, so serious, that, in His sight, it constituted the Assembly a fallen Assembly. Outwardly there was nothing in the Assembly that the Lord condemns, and nothing about which the world would find fault. The Assembly might indeed be marked by characteristics that the world could neither understand nor imitate, but at any rate the world would hardly condemn those who are marked by works, toil, endurance, hatred of evil, and refusal of pretension. Outwardly all was fair, and the candlestick appeared to be burning brightly enough before the world. Yet, under the surface, there was that which, in the eye of the Lord spoilt all this fair show. The Assembly had left its first love to Christ. It was not that they had left their love to Christ; but they had left their first love to Christ. One has said, "How dreadful a dishonour to Christ is this, to lose one's first love! It is as if at first sight He was more than He proved on longer acquaintance."

What, we may ask, is first love? Is not first love an absorbing love: a love that finds complete satisfaction of heart in its object. The love that satisfies must be an absorbing love. A love that absorbs the mind and heart is the love that excludes other objects, and satisfies because it fills the heart.

There was a time when Christ was all in all to the Assembly at Ephesus. Then, indeed, Christ satisfied their hearts, absorbed their thoughts, and engrossed their energies. That early freshness had passed. They had not ceased to labour for Christ, nor love and suffer for Christ, but their labour and love had lost its early freshness. The first love had gone.

What was it, however, that had absorbed their love in those early days? Was it not the realization of Christ's love for them? The love that passeth knowledge — the love of Christ for His Assembly — had been set forth before them; but as time passed they lost in measure the sense of His great love for them, and thus they left their first love for Him. The fact that Christ reproaches the Assembly with having left her first love, is a proof of the greatness of His love to the Assembly. Such is His love that He cannot be satisfied without the whole-hearted return of her love to Him. It is only the full response of love that can satisfy love. Works for Christ, however great, will not satisfy the heart of Christ. Mary's devoted love is more approved than Martha's toiling service. It is not that works will be lacking where there is love. Mary who chose the "good part," did the "good work," and, the Lord Himself, in this address links "first love" with "first works." There were indeed works at Ephesus of which the Lord could approve, but they were not the first works that were the outcome of first love.

Here then the Lord discovers to us the root of all decline, whether it be in the Assembly as a whole, or in the individual believer. All the ruin that has come in; all the subsequent evil that develops in other Assemblies, have their root in this first departure. In Ephesus we see the first step that leads to the complete break down of the Assembly in responsibility. In Laodicea we see the full result. The first step in Ephesus was loss of first love, the full result, in Laodicea, is the loss

of Christ altogether. Christ is outside the door. If Christ is not retained in the heart of the Assembly, the time will come when Christ will be outside the door of the Assembly.

(V. 5). The exposure of this hidden source of decline is followed by a solemn word of warning. The Lord can say, "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen." In the eyes of others the Assembly at Ephesus might well appear as a pattern Assembly; in the sight of Christ it was fallen. Not only is the Assembly called to remember, but repent. It is useless to bemoan the loss of early freshness if there is no repentance. What is repentance but owning our true condition before the Lord? If truly repentant we shall put our feet into the hands of the Lord that He may remove the defilement that has come in to hinder our enjoyment of His love to us, and dull our first love to Him. If our feet are in His hands, He can remove all the dust of the way, so that, like John of old we can, as it were, rest our heads on His bosom, there again to taste the joy of first love. The result of getting back to first love would be seen in first works. The Thessalonian Assembly, like the Ephesian Assembly, was marked by "work," and "labour," and. "patience," but of the Thessalonian Assembly we read that their work was a work of faith; their labour was labour of love; and their patience the patience of hope.

Then comes a last word of warning. If the Assembly does not repent — if there is no recovery, no return to first love — the Lord warns that He will come to them in the way of judgment and remove their candlestick out of its place. The place of the Assembly was to be a light for Christ in this dark world. This place can only be maintained as the heart is right with Christ. This loss of place with which the Assembly is threatened, is viewed as the Lord’s own act. He will remove the candlestick, even as of old He removed Israel from the land in which they should have been a witness to Jehovah. In either case the removal may be effected through the instrumentality of the world, none the less it is the Lord’s own act.

(V. 6). If however there was loss of first love for Christ, they had not yet lost their hatred of those who were a dishonour to Christ. The Nicolaitanes appear to have been those who made the profession of Christianity a cover for sin. They used the grace of God to indulge the lusts of the flesh. Such conduct was hated by Christ, and rightly hated by the Assembly at Ephesus. This evil showed itself at first in abominable conduct. In the later Pergamos period of the Assembly’s history, the evil so far progresses that evil deeds are supported by evil doctrine.

(V. 7). Following upon the warning there is the appeal to the one with the hearing ear, to hear what the Spirit has to say to the Assemblies. The Lord sends these addresses to the Assemblies, but throughout the ages the Spirit applies the Lord’s words to the heart and conscience of the one with the hearing ear. Thus in the Lord’s message to the angel of the Church at Ephesus there is disclosed to the one who has the opened ear the hidden root of all the increasing failure that has marked the Assembly in her fang history as the responsible witness for Christ on the earth. The first failure was not in her testimony before the world, but in her secret relations with Christ. Inward departure ever precedes outward failure. The address closes with the Lord’s promise to the overcomer. The normal overcoming for the Assembly should be in relation to the world, even as John tells us, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4). Here the overcoming has to be within the Christian profession, a sad witness to the fallen condition of the Church. For the encouragement of the overcomer the Lord holds out the promise of eating of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. In the paradise of man there were two

trees, one connected with privilege and one with responsibility. Man disobeyed and lost all blessing on the ground of responsibility. God came into the garden only to drive out a fallen man. Now the way is opened for man to enter the paradise of God as the result of redemption, there to feed on Christ the tree of life, and to go no more out. The overcomer, the one who repents and gets back to first love, has the promise of being eternally satisfied with the fruit of the tree of life in the paradise of God. At the same time, the Lord surely intends that the overcomer should have a foretaste of these encouragements while he is overcoming down here.

Smyrna.

Revelation 2:8-11.

If the address to Ephesus brings before us the condition of the Church in the last days of the apostolic era, the address to Smyrna vividly portrays the condition of the Church during the years of persecution that continued for two centuries after the Apostles had passed away. In Ephesus we see an outwardly united Church in separation from the world, but, one that had declined from first love to Christ, and, therefore, in His sight a fallen Church. There was the call to repentance and the warning that, unless the Church returned to first love, it would lose its place of testimony before the world. Alas! there was no general return to first love, and hence, to the end of her sojourn on earth, the Church is viewed as a fallen Church. There may indeed be revivals, and individuals that overcome, but that which has the place of being the Church on earth is fallen, ceases to be a true witness for Christ. Ceasing to witness for Christ in the world, the Church increasingly adapts itself to the world, until, in its last stage, it is the world. Finally, when all that is of Christ in the midst of the profession, is taken away, the vast and empty profession, that is left, comes under the judgment of the world. In the freshness of first love the Church was entirely separate from the world, and the world had no power over the Church. The allurements of this world have no attraction for a heart that is satisfied with the love of Christ. Leaving first love, whether in the case of an individual, or of the Church as a whole, opens the door for the world to enter and assert its power. The Church when it left first love took the first step that leads to the world where Satan dwells.

It is well then to remember that in the Smyrna period the Church is already a fallen Church. In tender love we see the Lord dealing with this fallen Church in a way that, for a time, arrests this downward path. The Lord passes the Church through the furnace of affliction. Ephesus was without reproach before the world but fallen before Christ; as the result of the Lord's dealing, Smyrna was persecuted by the world, but faithful before the Lord.

(V. 8). The Lord presents Himself to this Church in the glory of His Person, as the First and the Last; and in the glory of His work as the One who became dead and lived.

What could be more suited to sustain and encourage those who are called to meet the power of Satan, and faced with a martyr's death, than the knowledge that they are in the hands of a divine Person — the First and the Last — One who existed before every opposing power, and will remain when the last enemy has been put under His feet: One, therefore, who is above all. The Lord may indeed use the hostility of the enemy to pass His people through trial, but, if He is the First and the Last no power of the devil can finally prevail against those that are His. Moreover, if called to face a Martyr's death, Christ, Himself, has led the way in the path of martyrdom; for He has suffered

death at the hands of men. He became dead and lived: seemingly defeated and slain, yet emerging in victory over the last and greatest of enemies. Death could not prevail against Him; therefore death will not prevail against those that are His.

(V. 9). Having presented Himself in a way so blessedly suited to their condition and circumstances, the Lord lets these suffering saints know that all is under His eye. "I know," He says. He would have them to realize that the trials they are passing through, the circumstances they are in, the opposition of Satan they may have to meet, and the sufferings they may yet have to face, are all known to Him. Nor is it otherwise to-day. Our trials, our circumstances, the opposition we may have to meet, whether within the Christian circle or without, are all known to One, who, being the First and the Last, can see the end from the beginning. If, however, He is the First and the Last, with all power in His hands, why are His people permitted to pass through trial? Is it not because He has, — not only all power in His hands, but, — all love in His heart? Divine love knows full well that trials are needed for our blessing; and, loving us, He sends the trials according to that Word which says, "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth" (Hebrews 12:6). We may lose our first love to the Lord, but never will He leave His first love to us. "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." If in His unchanging love He has to pass us through trial, it is for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness. Knowing all things, He knew from whence the Church had fallen, and He knew to what depths it would yet fall. The One who is the First and the Last deals with us according to His perfect knowledge, and His infinite love. In His dealings He not only corrects for past failure, but would also form us according to His own holiness in the present, and prepare us for what He sees we may yet have to meet in the future.

It may be pointed out that the word "works," of this verse, is not in the original. These saints were not characteristically distinguished by works, but by suffering. The saints of the Ephesian period were great workers; the saints of the Smyrna period were great sufferers. Let us remember there is the service of suffering as well as the service of doing. The trials that were allowed to come upon the Church at this period were three-fold; suffering from the world, poverty of circumstances, and opposition from the devil. A church that has left first love is in danger of drifting into the world; to arrest this tendency the Lord allows persecution from the world. Moreover, a fallen Church that is drifting towards the world will ever be in danger of adopting the world’s methods, and of attempting to advance the Lord’s interests by means of earthly riches, and the acquisition of worldly power and influence. How different the early Church, composed mainly of the poor, and without worldly power or influence. Then indeed they were enriched with "great power," and "great grace." This, however, was spiritual power and the grace from another world. Foreseeing the danger of the world, the Lord stripped the Church of Smyrna, in such fashion, that they were poor in those things that the world counts gain, such as wealth, power, and influence, in order to leave them rich in His sight. Thus the Lord can say of this Church, "I know thy tribulation, and thy poverty, but thou art rich." Better far to be poor in the eyes of the world, and rich in the sight of the Lord, than to be rich and increased with goods, like the Church in its last stage, and yet, "wretched and miserable and poor" in the eyes of the Lord.

Alas! in contrast with the Church at Smyrna we see the Christian profession fast falling, on every hand, into a Laodicean condition, in which the professed followers of the One who had not where to lay His head, are vying with one another to obtain power and influence in the world. In the day of Smyrna the Lord used the persecution of the world, with its consequent impoverishment of the

saints, to stem the drift towards the world.

There was, however, another way in which the enemy sought to entangle the Church and draw it into the world. In the Smyrna period the Church had to meet the opposition of those who insisted on Jewish principles and thus sought to draw the Church into a worldly religion. Probably the word "Jews" is used in a figurative sense, signifying those who, like the Jews, boasted in an hereditary and sacramental system which associated religion with the world and sought to make it attractive to the flesh by the use of magnificent buildings, gorgeous vestments, and histrionic ceremonies. Thus the effort was made to turn Christianity into a system which, while highly pleasing to the flesh, keeps the soul at a distance from God. Moreover, such a system necessitates a human priesthood after the Jewish pattern, for, it has been truly said, whenever the world is connected with religion, priesthood must come in, because the world, as such, cannot stand and does not want to stand, before God.

We can well understand these Judaising teachers coming to the front in times of persecution, for such would offer a specious way of escape from persecution. The Apostle Paul asks, "If I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? Then is the offence of the cross ceased." The law recognises, and appeals, to the flesh with its imposing temples, splendid ceremonies, and ornate ritual. If we consent to recognise the flesh and adopt methods that appeal to the flesh, the world would have no objection to being religious, and, instead of persecuting, would begin to patronise a Christianity corrupted according to its tastes. The devil’s attack on the Church in the Smyrna period of its history took a double form. First the devil sought to undermine the foundations of the Church by corrupting it with Judaism. This failing, the devil opposed the Church by persecution. It is ever thus that the devil works. The special malignity of the devil drawn forth by the birth of the Lord, first took the form of corruption, when Herod sought to find the young Child under the false pretension of desiring to pay Him homage. This failing the devil sought by violence to destroy the Child by slaying all the young children in Bethlehem. So too, when the gospel was first preached in Europe, we see another outburst of the devil’s enmity, when he sought to stop the work by the devil-possessed woman, who corruptly appeared to be helping on the work. This wile being exposed, the devil resorted to violence, hounding on the people to beat the apostles and thrust them into prison. Here, in the early history of the Church, the apostles having passed from the scene, the devil again made a twofold attack upon the Church. He sought first to seduce the Church from her heavenly calling through the corrupting influences of those who, by their practices, proclaim themselves to be Jews but are not. Such would seek to form a Church after the pattern of the Jewish system, with the addition of Christian beliefs. This would not be a true Jewish synagogue nor a pure Christian Assembly, but a mixture of both and therefore a mere imitation — a synagogue of Satan. At this stage of the Church’s history the effort apparently failed; for those whom the devil used are not spoken of as the Church. They might indeed be seeking to work in the Assembly, but the Lord says, "I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews." The Lord knew them and the Church resisted them.

(V. 10). The attack by corruption having failed, the devil was permitted to resort to violence, as the Lord says, "The devil shall cast some of you into prison." The violence of the devil may indeed be painful to God’s people but it is safer for them than the wiles of the devil. The Lord allows this attack, for, as Peter says in his Epistle, the saints may indeed be "in heaviness through manifold temptations," "if need be." If, however, the Lord sees a "need be" for the trial, He will also put a

limit to the trial: so we read, "Ye shall have tribulation ten days." So, too, Peter says these manifold trials are but "for a season." The devil may be allowed to cast some into prison, but he cannot go a day beyond the Lord's ten days. The Lord does not hide from these saints the path that lies before them. Suffering, imprisonment, and possible martyrdom, will be their portion. Nevertheless, He encourages them to "fear not," to be "faithful," and that even unto death, for beyond death there is the crown of life. The Lord sets before them the cross here, and the crown hereafter. Of old the Lord had said to His disciples, "Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do" (Luke 12:4). Beyond death neither men nor devils have any power. They cannot touch the tree of life in the paradise of God, nor the crown of life that awaits the faithful martyr.

If in this life the devil is permitted, at times, to raise persecution against the saints, it is not that they may be vanquished, but, as the Lord says to these suffering saints "that ye may be tried." This trial is not for the trial of the flesh, but for the trial of faith, therefore the Lord says, "Be ye faithful." The Lord could say to Peter, "Simon, Simon, 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 restored, strengthen thy brethren." Years afterwards we are permitted to hear Peter strengthening his brethren. He reminds them that men try their gold with fire, but the believer's faith is much more precious than gold that perisheth. So they must not be surprised if God tries the faith of His saints by passing them through the fiery furnace of persecution. If He does thus try them it is in order that their faith may be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ. The martyr's death in the day of suffering, will lead to the crown of life in the day of glory.

(V. 11). The "ten days" of fiery persecution may be passed, but none the less we are to hear what the Spirit saith to the Churches. What was said to Smyrna in the days of fiery persecution has a voice for us in these days of easy profession. It tells us the true character of the world under the power of Satan. It reminds us of the two ways in which the world can divert the Church from its allegiance to Christ. On the one hand by corrupting the Church with a worldly religion that is a mixture of Judaism and Christianity; or, if the Church resists this, by open persecution. We find ourselves in the last days of Christendom when the wile of corruption has so thoroughly leavened the vast mass of the Christian profession, that it is hardly necessary for the devil to persecute. Nevertheless neither the devil nor the world have altered in hostility to Christ. In the day of persecution, how suited is the promise to the overcomer. He shall not be hurt of the second death. The body may be hurt by the torturer's rack or the flames of a martyr's death; but the soul of the believer cannot be hurt of the second death. The martyr's death may separate soul from body, but the second death will never separate the soul of the believer from God. The overcomer is to enjoy the comfort of this promise while passing through sufferings, that afterwards may be consummated in martyrdom.

Pergamos.

Revelation 2:12-17. The address to the Church in Ephesus clearly shows that the departure of the Christian profession, from the place of a witness for Christ, on earth, commenced with the loss of first love to Christ. In the address to the Church at Smyrna, we learn how this decline was, for a time, arrested by the Church being allowed to pass through a period of persecution. At the same time the Church was troubled by Judaising teachers, who sought, apparently, to escape the persecution of the world by attempting to link the forms of Judaism with the doctrines of

Christianity. For a time the persecution drew out the faithfulness of the saints. Nevertheless, the leaven of Judaism, though at the time resented, was working in the Smyrna period. This effort to turn the Christian Assembly, composed only of true believers, into an imitation Jewish synagogue, composed of a mixed company of believers and unbelievers, would naturally let the world into the Church, and thus prepare the way for the Church to settle down in the world.

This, the next stage in the downward history of the Christian profession, is the outstanding mark of the Church in the Pergamos period. A Judaised Church is no longer an offence to the world. In an earlier day, the Apostle Paul could write, "If I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased" (Galatians 5:11).

(V. 12). The presentation of Christ to the angel of the Church in Pergamos has reference to the condition of the Church at this period. The Lord presents Himself as "He which hath the sharp sword with two edges." We know from Hebrews 4:12, that the two-edged sword is a figure of the Word of God. The Psalmist can speak of the Word as a lamp unto his feet. Here it is not viewed as a light for the Christian's path, but as a sword to deal with all that is contrary to the light. The word viewed as the sword is ever judicial. It may, indeed, be used by the Spirit to defend the Christian against the wiles of the devil (Ephesians 6:11-17); or, as in this solemn passage, used by Christ against the public professing Christian body, unless there is repentance.

(V. 13). At once the Lord passes to speak of that which is so serious in His eyes. He says, "I know where thou dwellest, even where Satan's throne is." Satan, we know, is the prince of this world, and his throne is where he rules. It is not in hell as poets vainly dream. His throne is where he reigns, not in the place to which he will be consigned when his throne is crushed, and his reigning time is over. Nor does he merely reign at Rome, or Pergamos. His throne is not local, it is the world. If the professing Church dwells in the place of Satan's throne we may be sure the Church has given up her pilgrim and stranger character and settled down in the world. The Lord said of His people, "Ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world." Moreover, the Lord Jesus Christ "gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world." Furthermore, Christians are called with an heavenly calling, — their home is in heaven. The Church belongs to heaven and should wear a heavenly character. How solemn then, for that which takes the place before the world of being the Church, to abandon the heavenly calling, fling away its heavenly character, and settle down in the world. It is true the Christian is in the world, and, indeed, the Lord speaks of His disciples as sent into the world, for He can say to the Father, "As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world" (John 17:18). How then was He sent? Assuredly not to "dwell" in the world, but to witness to God as the Light of the world. The One, who when on earth, could speak of Himself as "the Son of Man which is in heaven" (John 3:13), was no "dweller" in this world. Truly He walked on earth, but He dwelt in heaven. Scripture makes it abundantly plain that the world is the place of our pilgrimage, where we are left for a time to "shine as lights in the world." To dwell in the world is to attempt to settle down in this scene as if it were our abiding home.

Such then was the solemn condition of the Church in the period of its history depicted in the address to Pergamos. It was no longer a witness in the world, but a dweller in the world. Dwelling signifies the moral character of the profession, just as the expression "earth dwellers," afterwards used in the Revelation, sets forth the character of a certain class. The angels visited Sodom in the

way of testimony: Lot dwelled there, he found his home there; and his character was formed by the place he dwelt in.

Having settled in the world the Church ceases to be a witness for Christ, and the world ceases to persecute the Church. When the world and the Church associate together, there is nothing left to persecute. From this period the Church, as a whole, lost its heavenly character, never to be regained throughout its history on earth; and worse, for Christianity has become amongst men simply a means for the betterment of the masses, and the advancement of temporal interests.

Nevertheless, there was still that which the Lord could commend, for we hear the Lord saying, "Thou holdest fast My name, and hast not denied My faith." Name in Scripture is ever the expression of what a person is, and would thus set forth the truth of Christ's Person. "My faith" sets forth the great truths of Christianity concerning the incarnation, death, and resurrection of our Lord. In spite of the fact that the professing body had settled down in the world, and thus given up its heavenly character, the Church, at this period still held fast to the truth of the Person of Christ, and refused to be drawn into any denial of the faith of Christ.

This, however, implies that at this period there was an attempt to wrest from the Church the great truths of Christianity. Arianism, that denied the deity of Christ, Appollinarianism that attacked His humanity, and Nestorianism that made of our Lord two Persons, arose in the Fourth Century. The Church by condemning these heresies in its different councils, held fast to the truth of Christ's Person, some even laying down their lives rather than surrender the truth. Antipas was a bright example of one of whom the Lord speaks as "My faithful witness, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth." No longer could the Lord speak of the Church as a whole as "My faithful witness," but there were still faithful individuals.

How deeply encouraging that the Lord lets us know that however great the general decline, however dark the day, He still sees individuals of whom He can approve, and speak of them as "His," and not only as witnesses for Him, but as being "faithful witnesses." So, too, the Apostle Paul, when instructing us as to a day of ruin, evidently contemplates the existence of such, for he can charge Timothy to commit the truth to "faithful men" (2 Timothy 2:2). The faithfulness of Antipas led him to a martyr's death. He was a bright witness to Christ in Satan's world, and thus a shining example of what the whole Church should have been in this world, and by contrast was a condemnation of the Church in its low condition. It is true that the Assembly was not in acknowledged association with the Satan-ruled world that had already strewn its true character by martyring the Lord's faithful witness; nevertheless, the Lord's words would seem to cast a deep reproach upon the fallen Church, for He says of this faithful witness, he "was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth." It is as if the Lord said to the Church, "You live where Satan dwells, but My faithful witness died where Satan dwells."

(V. 14). Thus we realize that while the Lord will ever have His faithful witnesses, from this time forward, the Church as a whole has settled down in the world. The next step downward is to compromise with the world in which it has settled. It might have been argued that the world, having ceased to persecute the Church, was a changed world. The only change was outward, in its manners. It covered its nakedness with an outward profession of Christianity; at heart it remained the same in its love of sin, and hatred of Christ. Nevertheless, the Church having left its first love was ready to fall a prey to its allurements. This further decline is illustrated by the history of

Balaam. This desperately wicked man is brought before us in Numbers 22:1-41, Numbers 23:1-30, Numbers 24:1-25. He was hired by Balak to curse the people of God. Unable to assist Balak in destroying the people of God by curses, he taught him how to encompass their fall by corruption. Compelled to utter the mind of God as to Israel, he had said, "Lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations." It was this separation between Israel and the world, that Balaam sought to break down. Association with the world in its Moabitish character is the doctrine of Balaam. In order to secure "the wages of unrighteousness," he teaches Balak how "to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel," by breaking down the wall of separation, and thus establishing intercourse between Israel and the nations (Numbers 31:16). Balak acts upon this evil advice; the result is seen in Numbers 25:1-18. Instead of seeking to raise further opposition to Israel, Balak allows them to settle in his land. Thus we read, "Israel abode in Shittim," a town in the plains of Moab (Numbers 33:49). Having settled in the world of Moab, the people of God fall into the unholy and idolatrous ways of the world. As with Israel, so with the Church that has settled down to dwell in the world; it forms an unholy alliance with the world, and adopts its idolatry. Thus at this stage of the Church's history, men were tolerated who taught that it would be to the advantage of the Church, and the world, if Christians mingled with the men of the world. Individuals might protest, but the mass no longer resisted these false teachers. The Lord does not say, as to the Church in Ephesus, "Thou hatest," or "Thou hast tried them" and "found them liars," but, "Thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam." Evil teachers were tolerated, and evil practices followed. As ever, bad doctrine leads to bad practice.

(V. 15). The teaching of Balaam was association between the people of God and the world. Furthermore, the Pergamos stage of the Church's history, was marked by those that held the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes. Apparently their evil was turning the grace of God to licentiousness. It first showed itself by immoral deeds brought into the Christian circle from the heathen world. These licentious deeds were hated and refused by the Church in Ephesus. In Pergamos this fearful evil had taken a more subtle form, inasmuch as this wickedness was now defended by doctrine. Probably Peter refers to the teachers of this evil doctrine, when he warns the Church that "There shall be false teachers among you who privily shall bring in destructive heresies," and he adds, "Many shall follow their dissolute ways." The allusions to the sect of the Nicolaitanes in profane writings are so utterly unreliable, that it is difficult to glean anything certain as to them from this source. For this reason some have thought that the word is used in a symbolic sense. Such say the word means "conquerors of the people," and indicates the rise of clericalism. Against this view we have to remember that the etymology of the word is purely conjectural. The allowance of these false doctrines paves the way for the inevitable union of the Christian profession, in its later stages, with the world; the result being that the Church debased itself by falling into the world's idolatry, and the world put on an outward veneer of respectability by the adoption of the Christian profession.

(V. 16). Warnings follow. Opportunity is given for repentance. If there is no repentance, the Lord would come to the Church, as a professing body, in the way of judgment, and that quickly. This is not the actual coming of the Lord to take those who really form His Church — His body — to heaven, which is also said to be quickly, but a moral coming, in which the Lord acts judicially against those who are corrupting the Christian profession. The Lord does not say I will fight against "thee," but against "them." If the Church had no longer power to deal with evil teachers,

and evil doers, the Lord may act directly to purge out the evil and maintain the honour of His Name. This judgment would be with the sword of His mouth. These evil teachers would be exposed and condemned by the Word of God. The Word that is a light and comfort, to those who obey it, becomes a sword to condemn those who slight its warnings and instructions.

(V. 17). Following the appeal to the one with the opened ear, there is the promise to the overcomer, connected with "the hidden manna," "a white stone," and "a new name." The manna was God's provision from heaven to feed Israel in their wilderness journey. Spiritually we know that Christ is "the bread that came down from heaven" to be the food of His people in their wilderness circumstances. The manna sets forth Christ come, not only in Manhood, but also into wilderness circumstances, to enter into all that we have to face in a fallen world, apart from sin. The "hidden manna" refers to the manna that was placed in the ark for a memorial. Christ is now exalted on high; He is no longer seen in humiliation. The privilege, however, of the overcomer, is to know that the One who is now in glory, was once in this wilderness scene, and trod a lonely path as the meek and lowly One; that He once faced the scorn of a hostile world, and the contradiction of sinners.

Alas! the professing body had settled down to find its home in this world; it was entering into an unholy alliance with the world and eating things sacrificed to idols. The overcomer refused to be drawn into the world: to him the world was still a wilderness, and he but a stranger and a pilgrim. Having refused to eat of the things sacrificed to idols, the Lord says, "I will give him to eat of the hidden manna."

Further, the Lord can say, "I will give him a white stone." This appears to be a figure drawn from the voter's urn, in which a white stone was put when approving a candidate, or a black stone when disapproving. As a figure it carries the thought of the Lord giving the overcomer the sweet sense of His approval. The overcomer may indeed meet the disapproval of man as he stands against the unholy alliance of the Church and the world; nevertheless, he will be cheered with the thought of the Lord's approval as set forth in the white stone.

Moreover, in the stone there is a new name written. Names in Scripture are not used simply to distinguish one person from another, but to set forth the individual character of a person. Does not the new name indicate the character which Christ sees and appreciates in the individual to whom He gives a new name. The world may defame, and seek to impute evil motives to the overcomer who refuses to go with the crowd to do evil. The Lord, however, gives the overcomer the secret joy of realizing that his true character is known and valued by Himself.

Thyatira.

Revelation 2:18-29. In order to rightly interpret the address to Thyatira, and the addresses that follow, it is important to see the characteristic differences between the first three addresses and the last four.

It is clear that the first three Churches set forth the condition of the whole professing Church at three successive periods of its history. Moreover, the general condition set forth by these Churches does not continue throughout the Church's history; though, indeed, the evils that develop, during the periods set forth by these Churches, continue to mark the Christian profession for all time.

Thus the united testimony of the Church that marked the Ephesian period has passed away; though the loss of first love has ever since marked the Christian profession.

Again, the Church as a whole is no longer persecuted as in the Smyrna period; though the leaven of Judaising teachers continues to work throughout Church history.

Moreover, the Church as a whole is no longer marked by holding fast the Name of Christ, and maintaining the faith, as in the Pergamos period; while, alas, it is still true that the profession as a whole has lost the heavenly calling and become utterly worldly.

Coming to the last four addresses, it will be noticed that, in the main, three things distinguish them from the first three addresses. In the first place we find in the last four Churches the coming of the Lord is either directly presented, or implied, for encouragement or warning. Secondly, in each of these Churches we have a remnant distinguished from the main professing body. Thirdly, in the last four Churches, the call to hear what the Spirit says to the Churches, comes after the promise to the overcomer.

These three facts are deeply significant. The first — the fact of the Lord’s coming being brought before the Churches — would indicate that the conditions set forth by the last four Churches will continue to the end of the Church period. Furthermore, the fact that a remnant is distinguished leads to the conclusion that there is no longer any hope of recovery for the Church as a whole. In the first three Churches there is held out the possibility of repentance, and thus a return to a right condition. In Thyatira there is indeed the call to repentance, but it is definitely stated "she will not repent" (N. Tr.). The increasingly corrupt mass passes on to judgment, though out of the corruption God secures a remnant for Himself. Finally, the fact of the appeal to the one with the hearing ear, coming after the promise to the overcomer, is a further proof that the Christian profession is so hopelessly corrupt that the one who hears will no longer be found in the Church at large, but only amongst the overcomers.

While, however, it is important to see the distinction between the first three and the last four Churches, it is equally important to see the connection between the first three Churches and Thyatira. In the period of the Church’s history set forth by Ephesus, there was still a united testimony before the world. There was, however, the root of all failure — the decay of first love to Christ. This solemn loss of first love paved the way for the Church to descend to the level of the world. In the following period of the Church’s history — set forth by Smyrna — the downward course of the public professing body was, for a time, arrested by persecution from the world. In the Pergamos period, persecution having ceased, the decline in the condition of Christendom was rapid. Already the Church had given up first love to Christ, now the Church gives up her heavenly calling, and, ceasing to be a separate company, settles down in the world where Satan dwells. The Church having thus accommodated herself to the world, the world ceases to persecute the Church. The unholy alliance between the Church and the world, leads the Church to adopt the practices of the world, while the world puts on an outward profession of Christianity. Thus, in this period, we see the formation of the worldly religious sphere known as Christendom. In the period set forth by Thyatira there is a further advance in evil. Under the figure of the woman Jezebel, we see the development of a worldly ecclesiastical system which seeks to become, the universal mistress of Christendom. Throughout the middle ages, for well nigh a thousand years, the condition set forth by Jezebel characterised the public professing body. With the development of

the Sardis condition, the Thyatira condition, while still persisting, ceased to be representative of the Church as a whole.

Keeping in mind these characteristic differences between the addresses to the Churches, we shall be better prepared to consider the details of the address to Thyatira.

(V. 18). Christ presents Himself to this Church as "the Son of God who hath His eyes like unto a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass." The title Son of God in this connection is deeply significant. We know from the Lord's own words to Peter that Christ as the Son of God is the rock on which the Church is built. Commencing with the Thyatira period we find the rising up of a system that sets aside the Son of God' and exalts a man to be the rock on which the Church is built.

Further, Christ is presented as One whose eyes are as a flame of fire, speaking of the searching penetrating gaze from which no evil is hidden, and whose burning condemnation evil must encounter. His feet are like fine brass, reminding us of the absolute firmness, and inflexible righteousness, of the way He takes in dealing with the evils discovered by His penetrating gaze.

(V. 19). Following upon the Lord's presentation of Himself, we have the Lord's commendation of His own. He says, "I know thy works, and love, and faith, and service, and shine endurance, and thy last works to be more than thy first" (N. Tr.). It is exceedingly blessed that, in this dark day of the Church's history, the Lord finds so much to commend. Neither in the Smyrna or Pergamos period were there any works for the Lord's commendation.* In the Smyrna period bitter persecution called forth suffering for Christ's sake; but would hardly lead to active works. In the Pergamos period, the Church, having found its dwelling in the world, would hardly bring forth "works" that the Lord could commend. In the Ephesian period there were indeed works that the Lord commends, but the "love" and "faith" that were lacking in their works, are found in the works of Thyatira. Moreover, the Lord says, "I know . . . the last works to be more than the first" (N. Tr.). Their activity did not wither under the prevailing corruptions, nor fade with the passing of time.

{*The word "works" in verses 9 and 13 is an interpolation.} That such high commendation was found in a day when the general condition of Christendom was so low, only illustrates the truth that the greater the corruption of the professing mass, the greater the energy and devotedness of the faithful few. The greatest saints are found in the darkest day. Never was a darker day in Israel's history than when the wicked Jezebel ruled. Idolatry filled the land; false prophets and idolatrous priests swayed the mass; all was in disorder. Nevertheless, in that dark day, there were seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal; and there were devoted men of God, like Elijah and Elisha, who were famed for "works" that exceeded the works of any other saint of that dispensation. In the story of the Church, history repeats itself. Again a period arises which the Lord likens to the dark days of Jezebel, and again amidst the wickedness of that time, there shine forth, against the darkness, faithful individuals whose devotedness to Christ exceeds, perhaps, that of the saints of any other period since Pentecostal days. Of these devoted saints, one has written, in moving words, as follows: — "How have the sorrows and sufferings and labour and painful devotedness of the hunted but persevering witnesses in the dark ages, occupied the mind and feelings of thoughtful Christians. Nowhere, perhaps, is there a more deeply interesting story; nowhere longer and more unwearied patience; nowhere truer, or perhaps so true, hearts for the truth and for Christ, and for faithfulness to Him against a corrupt church, as in the saints of the

middle ages. Through toil and labour, hunted and punished in spite of a system far more persevering, far better organised, than heathen persecutions, violent as for a time they surely were; with no fresh miraculous revelation, or publicly sustaining body, or profession of the church at large, clothed with universal acknowledgment as such, to give them confidence; with every name of ignominy that people or priest could invent to hunt them with, they pursued their hemmed but never abandoned way, with divinely given constancy, and maintained the testimony of God, and the promised existence of the church against the gates of hades, at the cost of rest and home and life and all things earth could give or nature feel. And Christ had foreseen and had not forgotten it. Weakness may have been there, ignorance marked many of their thoughts Satan may have sought to mix up mischief with the good, and sometimes succeeded; and men, at their ease now, delight in finding the feeble or faulty spot, and perhaps succeed too; but their record is on high, and their Saviour's approbation will shine forth, when the books ease-loving questioners have written on them will be as dust on the moth's wing when it is dead; and shame, if shame can be where we may trust many of them may meet those they have despised, cover their face. This the Lord owns in Thyatira. It made no part of the church for men then. It makes none for many wise people now. It is the first part for Christ" (J.N.D).

(V. 20). Thus the Lord delights to approve of these devoted saints amidst the gross darkness of the middle ages. He will have a further word of encouragement for them; though first He turns aside to pass judgment on that of which He so deeply disapproves. In verses 20 to 23. there comes before us, under the symbol of Jezebel and her children. the appalling condition which was the outcome of a worldly ecclesiastical system that sought to rule Christendom. To understand the spiritual significance of the "woman Jezebel," we must recall the history of Israel in the days of the actual Jezebel. Ahab was then king, who "did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him." His great sin was that he took to wife the daughter of Ethbaal, King of the Zidonians. Having entered into, this worldly alliance he lost his place and authority as king, and permitted this wicked woman to rule, even to writing letters in his name, and subscribing them with his seal. Under her rule the whole country was led into idolatry; false prophets of Baal were protected, and the prophets of the Lord were persecuted. This evil condition of the nation of Israel, under the sway of Jezebel, is reproduced in the period of the Church's history represented by Thyatira. As the outcome of the false alliance of the Church with the world, in the Pergamos period, there arises a false ecclesiastical system that seeks to dominate Christendom; that, like a prophetess, professes to speak with divine authority, and communicate the mind of God; that takes the place of "teacher" and "leader" of God's people, for, says the Lord, "Thou sufferest . . . that woman . . . to teach and to lead away my servants" (N. Tr.). Thus the Word of God, as giving the mind of God, the Spirit of God as being the Teacher, and Christ as the Head and the Leader of His people, are set aside by the substituted teaching of this evil system.

Furthermore, under the figure of fornication, this evil system leads into unholy alliances with the world, and into communion with idolatrous things which have a direct link with Satan.

Thus in one short message to the Angel of the Church in Thyatira, the Lord sums up the outstanding features of that fearful ecclesiastical tyranny which, having its extreme expression in Rome, dominated Christendom in the dark ages, and continues in that system, and in the allied movements symbolised as children of Jezebel, to the end of the Church period.

(V. 21). Space was given for repentance; but, says the Lord, "She will not repent" (N. Tr.). To Ephesus it was said that unless there was repentance the candlestick would be removed. Here there is no mention of the candlestick, showing that the system represented by Jezebel was not acknowledged as a light for Himself.

(Vv. 22, 23). The Lord proceeds to pass judgment upon this false system; those associated with her; and her children. This vile system will come into "great tribulation." This surely looks on to the time, foretold in greater detail, in Revelation 17:1-18 and Revelation 18:1-24, when the revived Roman Empire will, as the instrument of God, destroy this system. Two classes will share her judgment: first, those who are found in unholy association with her — the kings of the earth, and the merchantmen who, to further their interests in this world, recognised, and entered into alliance with, her (Revelation 18:9). Second, there are those who are spoken of as "her children." It is not inferred that any of God's children are found in this company. They are the direct offspring of this vile system — a class that, like Jezebel, make a profession of religion, but are pure idolators. Such come under absolute judgment. They are killed with death — complete separation from God. They are not permitted to subsist longer on earth.

It is in vain that men throw a halo of religious fervour around this system, or seek to hide its fearful evil under an atmosphere of human kindness, and the glamour of false sentiment, for all the Churches will know that the Lord is One who searcheth the reins and hearts. His eyes, as a flame of fire, will discover the guiding principles, and the hidden motives, that determine the policy of this fearful system. And the One whose feet, like fine brass, tread a path of absolute righteousness, will give unto every one according to his works.

(Vv. 24, 25). Having condemned this terrible evil, the Lord turns again to those' whose love, and faith, and patience, He has already approved. Here for the first time we have a remnant distinguished from the corrupt mass. They have refused the idolatry, and worldly alliances of this false system, by which they are surrounded; they have not known the depths of Satan that arc concealed in a system under which Jesuitism, the Inquisition, indulgences, and the confessional can flourish. In the midst of the gross darkness of this satanic system it was much in God's sight that any should be found, marked by faith, love, endurance, and works, that have the Lord's approval. Upon such the Lord will lay no other burden — words that would imply they had heavy burdens to bear. Refusing the doctrine of Jezebel, brought them into constant suffering and persecution. In such circumstances all that the Lord looks for is that they "hold fast" that which they have until He comes.

They were hardly in a position to make any advance into the deep truths of Christianity; but the Lord does lay upon them the responsibility of holding fast the light they have. This was a measure of light that enabled them to refuse the teaching of Jezebel, escape the depths of Satan, and walk in practical piety.

Here, too, for the first time, in the course of these addresses, the Lord holds out the hope of His coming. The Lord's coming was ever the proper hope of the Church; the mention, however, of this blessed hope at this juncture indicates that the decline of the Church has reached a stage at which there is no longer any possible recovery for the mass of the Christian profession. Whatever revivals the Lord may grant, for the Lord's people, as a whole, there will henceforth be no recovery, until the Lord comes. There is nothing but judgment for Jezebel, and nothing but the

Lord’s coming for the godly remnant. To such there is no promise held out of any amendment in the Church; their hope is directed to Christ outside this scene, and His coming to take His people to Himself.

(Vv. 26-28). The promise to the overcomer reveals a blessed prospect to the one who "holds fast" amidst the abominations of Jezebel. The Church in Thyatira is the only one to whom the Lord adds an additional charge to overcoming. Thus He says, "He that overcometh and keepeth My works." It is as if the Lord would leave no question as to what is implied in overcoming this fearful system. It would seem that amidst the gross darkness of a system that takes the Word of God from believers, the Lord does not expect the overcomer to be distinguished by a deep knowledge of His Word; but this at least He does look for, that they should be marked by practical piety, and thus keep His works until the end. Moreover, in speaking of "my works," the Lord reminds us that, in His path, He ever did the will of God, as He could say to the Jews, "I do always those things that please Him."

Such will have power over the nations. The power over the world by which this ecclesiastical system sought its own advancement and glory during the absence of Christ, the godly persecuted overcomer will have at the coming of Christ. The overcomer will moreover, not only have power, but he will exercise power; he will rule with a rod of iron in the day when Christ deals with His enemies in absolute destruction, even as the vessels of a potter are broken to shivers.

Moreover, such will have "the morning star." Not only will they share the glorious reign of Christ, but they will enjoy a present knowledge of Christ, before He comes. The day star will arise in their hearts. Christ, as the Sun of righteousness, will arise upon this world with healing in His wings, but the day star shines before the rising of the sun. The overcomer will know and enjoy Christ as the Morning Star, before He shines before the world as the Sun of Righteousness.

Sardis.

Revelation 3:1-6. In the prophetic view of the Seven Churches, it is important to remember that the first three Assemblies are representative of conditions of the whole Christian profession, at three successive periods of its history; conditions, moreover, that have passed away with the periods represented by these Churches. In contrast to the first three Churches, the last four prophetically present conditions which, though they come successively on the scene, do not displace one another, but continue to the end. For this reason the last four Assemblies, in as far as they exist together, do not represent the condition of the whole Church at any given time.

If Thyatira sets forth the condition of Christendom during the dark ages, from A.D. 500 to A.D. 1500, when dominated by the Papal system, it is hardly possible to resist the conclusion that in Sardis there is set forth the condition of the professing Church under Protestantism. Here, however, we must carefully distinguish between the work of the Spirit of God at the Reformation, and the work of man which resulted in Protestantism. The address to Sardis does not set forth the Reformation, but rather the condition which marked those who, under the impulse of this movement, developed an ecclesiastical system in opposition to Rome. At the commencement of the Reformation there was a mighty work of the Spirit of God whereby the Scriptures were recovered for all, and justification by faith was preached. A vast number who received spiritual blessing under this movement broke with the Papacy. A still larger number, groaning under the

tyranny of Rome, threw in their lot with this movement for political motives, apart from any work of the Spirit in their souls. Thus a movement which at its commencement had been, under the guidance of the Spirit, a powerful witness to the truth, ended in becoming, under the guidance of men, little more than a protest against the tyranny and abominations of Rome. This protest aroused the hostility of Rome. In turn the opposition of Rome led the Protestants to range themselves under the protection of the world in order to defend themselves in the conflict with Rome. Thus, in contrast to the Romish system that sought to rule the world, there arose, in Protestantism, a system that sought the protection of the world, and has become dominated by the world. The resulting condition is set forth in Sardis.

It is instructive to mark the relation of the professing Church to the world, as set forth in these different addresses. In Ephesus the Church was separate from the world, and so far was a witness to the world, though the root of all decline was there. In Smyrna the Church was persecuted by the world, and thus, for the time, further decline was arrested. In the Pergamos period the persecutions ceased. At once the Church settled down in the world, while the world put on the profession of Christianity. Thus Christendom was formed. In Thyatira the professing Church assumed to take the upper hand and rule this Christianised world. In Sardis a section of the professing Church put itself under the protection and rule of the world. In Philadelphia there is presented a remnant separated from the corrupt religious world. In Laodicea the professing mass of Christendom becomes the world, and is treated as the world.

(V. 1). Confining our thoughts to Sardis it will be seen that the Lord presents Himself to this Church as, "He that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars." This surely would be rebuke to the Church, but encouragement for the godly remnant in the Church. The seven Spirits of God would speak of the fulness of the power of the Spirit at the disposal of the Lord. What a rebuke to those who have turned aside to seek the protection of the world’s power; but what an encouragement to the godly in a day of spiritual weakness amongst the people of God. Moreover, the Lord has the seven stars. When the professing mass are turning to the world and seeking its power and patronage, it is good for those who are responsible to represent Christ in the Assembly, and who are responsible to Christ for the condition of the Assembly, to remember, that they still belong to Christ, and are thus encouraged to own His authority and count upon Him for His support and guidance.

Following upon the presentation of Christ to the Church, we have the Lord’s judgment of the condition of Sardis. He says, "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." Thus, in Sardis, we see the condition of a large section of the professing Church which, having escaped the abominations of Thyatira, falls into spiritual torpor, contented with a public profession of orthodoxy. Mere profession may make a name before men, who only look on that which is outward: it is not life before Christ, who reads the heart. In Protestantism there is the reputation for maintaining the vital truths of Christianity, as opposed to the corruptions of Rome, but, in the sight of the Lord, there is no vital link with Himself in the vast mass of those who make this profession.

There is no vital power in Protestantism as such. Life is found in faith in the living Christ, not in protesting against evil. Hence any movement that depends for its existence upon protest against evil is bound to sink into spiritual torpor and death. The Reformation was indeed a protest against

the evils of the Papacy; but it was much more, than this. It was the powerful assertion of positive truths. In a short while, however, great masses of people identified themselves with the Reformation movement, not because they loved the truth, but because they hated Rome. Thus a condition has arisen that is characterized by the reputation for orthodoxy before men, without life before God.

(V. 2). Having passed judgment upon the condition of Sardis, the Lord utters some solemn warnings. First, He says, "Be watchful." The call to watchfulness implies that there had been a lack of watchfulness. The Church, while bidding for the power and patronage of the world, had been so engrossed with its present advancement in this scene, that it had ceased to watch against dangers that were imminent, and had ceased to remember the truth they had received. Paul, in his farewell address to the elders at Ephesus, links together watching and remembering, for having warned them of coming dangers, he says, "Therefore watch and remember." Thus too the Lord bids the Church in Sardis first to watch and then to remember.

Further, the Lord exhorts the Church to "strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die." In His sight the mass are already dead: the truths recovered at the Reformation are ready to die.

Moreover, the Lord rebukes the Assembly for their lack of practical piety. He says, "I have not found thy works perfect before God." God does not lower His standard because of the decline in the spiritual condition of the professing mass. The works He looks for are still measured by His perfect standard. The love was not perfect in Ephesus; the works were not perfect in Sardis.

How solemn is the condition of the Protestant profession as set forth in the Assembly in Sardis. The mass of profession dead; the truths once recovered, dying; practical piety and holiness at a low ebb. Alas! is it not notorious that the Protestant system is utterly powerless to maintain the truth, or to deal with evil, or restrain lawlessness, within its bounds. Their works are not perfect before God.

Nevertheless, Christ presents Himself to this Church in a way that clearly shows all the resources of power and government are perfect in His hands. Therefore there is power available for the Church to bring forth perfect works in a day of ruin. Alas! Sardis having turned to the world for its power, cannot avail itself of the resources in the Head of the Church.

(V. 3). To remember "how" they had received and heard, would recall to them the earnest condition of soul in which the truth had been received, and open their eyes to the present condition of deadness into which they had sunk. They lacked the power of the seven Spirits of God for the maintenance of the good: and the restraining power of Christ’s ministers of light and truth against evil. To "hold fast" would encourage them to cling to the great truths they were insensibly letting slip. To "repent" would involve self-judgment for their low spiritual condition, and poor walk. The Lord’s warning follows. "If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee." Thus the Lord’ rebukes the low condition of His professing people in two ways: first, He calls them to remember the past. Have they declined in conduct from those early days when the truth was first received? Then He recalls them to watchfulness. Let them not only look back, but look on, for He is coming. Are they in a state suited for His coming? If not, His coming would mean judgment rather than blessing. Thus it is the Lord presents His coming in the aspect it will take towards the world, "as a thief." The Apostle Paul

could write to the Thessalonians, "Ye brethren are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief." Nevertheless, he adds, "Let us not sleep as do others; but let us watch and be sober." Alas! in the day of Sardis the professing Church had ceased to watch, and was fast falling into darkness and deadness. Having appealed to the world for its patronage and power, the professing Church had become like the world, and is in danger of sharing the world's judgment. The coming of the Lord instead of bringing into blessing, as it will for all who believe unto life, will overwhelm in judgment this dead Church, in common with a dead world.

(V. 4). Amidst, however, the deadness of Sardis, the Lord sees, and delights to own, that there are those faithful to Himself. In Thyatira there are those that the Lord distinguishes from the corrupt mass, and of whom He speaks as "the rest." Here it is hardly a company, but only "a few names," that He can own. It would suggest that they are isolated individuals amidst the mass that are sunk in spiritual torpor. The Lord gives them a threefold commendation. First they have not defiled their garments. With all their orthodox profession the mass had defiled their garments. Their practical walk and ways were marred and defiled by association with the world, by bidding for its power, by accommodating themselves to its tastes, by adopting its methods. There are, however, faithful individuals — a few names — who maintain their separation from the world. The Lord knows their names, and says they have not defiled their garments.

Secondly, the Lord says of such, "They shall walk with Me in white." Separation from the world has its blessed outcome in a walk with Christ. Nevertheless, the walk is of an individual character. The Lord does not say they will know the blessedness of that word which- says, "Where two or three are gathered together unto My Name, there am I in the midst of them," but "they shall walk with Me." Whatever their ecclesiastical associations, their practical ways are suited to the Lord, for, they shall walk with Him "in white." Lastly the Lord says of such, "They are worthy." The orthodox mass are dead, the truths they profess are dying; their works are hot perfect; their garments are defiled by the world; they are utterly unworthy of Christ, and are passing on to the judgment of the world. In contrast to the condition of the mass, the Lord finds in these "few names" those who are worthy to be in His company now, and to share His glory in a day to come.

(V. 5). The first promise to the overcomer is to be "clothed in white raiment." There were a few names in Sardis of those who had not defiled their garments; they had walked in practical separation from the evils by which they were surrounded, and the Lord encourages such with the promise that their walk will have its suitable reward in a day to come. They will be clothed in white in the day of glory. The robes they wear in glory are woven in the path that leads to glory. The few names of those who had not defiled their garments represent only a handful of obscure individuals amidst a great lifeless profession; but they had the Lord's approval in the day of their obscurity, and their faithfulness will be brought into display in the presence of the Lord in the day of His glory.

Further, the Lord says of the overcomer, "I will not blot out his name out of the book of life." How many names held in high honour by Sardis, and written in its registers, would be found to represent mere lifeless professors, whereas the few names of those who had not defiled their garments were held in small esteem by Sardis, and even struck off its registers. Even so whatever men might do — the Lord says, "I will not blot out his name out of the book of life."

Finally, the Lord says of the overcomer, "I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels." Does not this high honour imply that before men the overcomer's name had been of little

account, if not derided, and show, moreover, how great is the Lord’s approval of one, who, in the midst of a lifeless profession boldly confesses His name?

(V. 6). The address closes with the appeal that, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches." It is the Lord’s desire that we should listen to the Spirit, as, throughout the ages He takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto us, and thus profit by the Lord’s words to each Church. An ever present snare to which believers are exposed is the attempt to maintain a religious reputation — a "name to live" — before one another, before our fellow Christians, and before the world, while neglecting to cultivate the fruits which are the outcome and evidence of life. In the midst of a vast profession we are to "watch," "strengthen the things which remain," to "remember how we have received and heard," "hold fast" and "repent" of any departure.

Philadelphia.

Revelation 3:7-13. The study of the addresses to the Seven Churches leads to the conclusion that the last four Churches, in contrast to the first three, set forth conditions that continue to the end of the Church period. Further, it will be found that in the last four Churches, there is a general distinction between the first two and the last two. In reference to Thyatira and Sardis, we see prophetically set forth conditions that are publicly represented before the world by the two great ecclesiastical systems known, respectively, as the Papacy and Protestantism. When, however, we come to the last two Churches, it is clear that the conditions we find therein do not correspond to any definite ecclesiastical systems which can be recognised in, or by, the world. These Churches set forth certain conditions of which the Lord takes account, either as having His approval, as in the Church of Philadelphia, or, as being utterly nauseous to Him, as in the Church of Laodicea.

Thus in Thyatira and Sardis we have great ecclesiastical systems which have a large place in the eyes of the world, and, in each of these systems, a godly remnant under the eye of Christ. In Philadelphia we see set forth a godly remnant, not in, but, apart from Thyatira and Sardis, having certain moral traits approved by the Lord, who wait for the coming of the Lord, and who make no pretension to a humanly devised ecclesiastical system of which the world can take account.

It is the greatest encouragement to those who desire to be true to the Lord, in a day of ruin, to see that these addresses present the great fact that when the condition of the Christian profession has become utterly corrupt and dead, there will be found under the eye of Christ those who are apart from the corruption and have His approval, and that such will be found until the end. Thus from the address to Philadelphia it is our high privilege to learn what has the Lord’s; approval in a day of ruin, so that we may, seek grace to answer to His mind.

(V. 7). Christ is presented to this Church as "The holy and the true, He that hath the key of David, He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth." No longer does the Lord present Himself in His official capacity in relation to the Churches, as holding the seven stars and walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, but in His moral perfections as the One who is "the holy" and "the true." Not only is He absolutely holy, but He is true to His holy character, true to God, and true to His own word. If, however, He thus presents Himself to His people it is in order that they should exhibit a character in keeping with Himself. If He presents Himself in a moral way it is that they should be morally like Him. He does not ask them to set up an

ecclesiastical organisation, or attempt to make a model Church in the midst of the ruin, but He does desire that, amidst the increasing gloom of Christendom, there should be found a people who set forth the excellencies of His character as the holy and the true. This will surely involve, on the one hand, separation from the corruptions of Christendom, and, on the other, the maintenance of the whole truth.

Moreover, the Lord is presented as having the key of David. The allusion is to Isaiah 22:21-22. The Prophet, using Eliakim as a type, speaks of the government of this world being given to Christ, for Jehovah says, "the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder." There are two symbols of government, the sword and the key. The sword speaks of the government dealing with, and restraining evil: the key speaks rather of government opening a way for right to prevail. The key hardly expresses administration in the Church, but rather government in the world — a government that no man can resist, producing conditions even in a hostile world, and in spite of the state of the Church, in which the Philadelphian can act according to the Lord's mind. The time has not yet come for the Lord to use the sword, but does He not exercise His governmental power, in as far as it is necessary, to open a door to those who seek to answer to His mind, in order that they may carry out His service? If they are seeking to wear the character of Christ, will they not have the support of Christ, and find that He will direct their steps, opening a door here or closing a door there, as He in His perfect wisdom decides? It is theirs to see that by separation from vessels to dishonour, and the cultivation of a character suited to Christ, they are fit and meet for the Master's use. Then will they not find that He will open a door to carry out His service? And He assures such that no man, however powerful in this world, or however much opposed to the truth, will be able to close the door that He has opened. What a comfort to know that the Lord holds the key and that, in spite of corruption within the Christian circle or opposition from without, He can make a way for His people that nothing can resist.

(V. 8). Following upon the Lord's presentation of Himself we have the Lord's commendation of the Philadelphian Church. There is nothing that meets with the Lord's condemnation. There are three characteristics that have His approval.

First, the Lord says, "Thou hast a little strength." This Church is not marked by any display of power that would attract the notice of the world. In the beginning of the Church's history there had indeed been a display of power that arrested the world. The gift of tongues had confounded the multitude; mighty works had amazed the world, and the power of the gospel had turned the world upside down. Apparently all the sign gifts, so impressive in the eyes of the world, were entirely absent in Philadelphia, so that we may judge miraculous display will not be found among those who have the Lord's approval in a day of ruin. "A little strength" is not a quality that appeals to the flesh, or attracts the world. The world delights in a strong man; God delights to carry out His work through weak vessels. Thus, in Philadelphia the Lord associates Himself with, and uses those, who have but a little strength. He says, "I have set before thee" — the one with a little strength — "an open door." Their wisdom then is not to assume power that they do not possess, nor covet gifts that have passed away, but rather own their true condition — that they have but a little strength — and thus find the support of the Lord, the One who has all power, who holds the key, and whom no man can resist.

Thyatira represents a system that arrogates to itself a power that would rule the world: Sardis a system that bids for the power and resources of the world. Philadelphia represents a little remnant apart from the world having but a little strength, though behind their weakness there is the mighty power and support of the Lord.

Secondly, the Lord can say of Philadelphia, "Thou . . . hast kept My word." Not simply the Word as a whole, however true that may be of the Philadelphians, but Christ's word. Is not Christ's word the whole revelation of Christianity communicated to us by Christ Himself when He was on earth, and afterwards through the revelations made to the Apostles from Christ in the glory? His word covers the whole circle of Christian truth and suggests that, in Philadelphia, there is, not merely the recovery of certain truths, as in Sardis, but the recovery of all Christian truth. Further, "keeping" the word implies that it is treasured in the heart and obeyed in the life. The Lord does not say thou hast expounded or taught the word, though this may be true; but He lays emphasis on the great fact that His word is kept. Those with little strength may have little gift, but they can be marked by that which is of far higher value in the eyes of the Lord — obedience to His word. Surrounded by a great profession that has abandoned the Word for the traditions of men, or science falsely so called, or ingenious handlings and applications of the Word to support their fanciful ideas, there are those who, shaking off the shackles of tradition, get back to Christ's Word, treasure that Word in their hearts, and seek to carry it out in their lives.

Thirdly, the Lord says of this Church, "Thou hast not denied My Name." Name in Scripture sets forth a Person's renown. Christ's Name is the perfect expression of all that He is in His glorious PERSON, as well as all that He has done in His mighty work. His name JESUS speaks of His saving work: His name EMMANUEL speaks of His glorious Person. Thyatira represents a system that arrogates to itself the place and power that belongs alone to Christ the Head of His Church, and thus usurps the renown that belongs to Christ. Sardis assumes that Name to make a fair profession before the world, and thus degrades the Name of Christ to add lustre to herself. In Philadelphia there are those who may not be able to unfold all the glories of that Name, nor refute and answer the unceasing attacks upon His Name, but this at least can be said of them, that, in the midst of all the attacks of the enemy upon the renown of Christ, they have refused to deny that Name. They have not denied the glory of His Person, not the greatness of His work.

It might not appear that there is much commendation in not denying His Name. There is nothing of a directly positive character in such testimony: nevertheless, it is precious in the eyes of the Lord to find in a day of ruin that there are some who refuse to deny His Name. Even so in the dark and apostate days when Ahab reigned in Israel, and Elijah stood for the glory of the Lord, it might seem a small thing that seven thousand had not bowed the knee to Baal, but it has the Lord's commendation.

(V. 9). We are next warned that those who are drawn together in brotherly love, in separation from the corruptions of Christendom, in obedience to the Word of Christ, will meet with opposition. Keeping the word of Christ would suggest that this godly remnant had returned to the principles of the Church as unfolded in that Word. This would naturally arouse the hostility of those who had departed from the Word and sought to mould the Church into a Jewish form. This opposition, however outwardly religious, would appear to be satanic in its origin. If there are those who have been brought back to the truth of Christ's words, and thus walk in the light of the Church as

revealed in those words, Satan will oppose such, not by persecution as in Smyrna, but, by raising up those who claim to be the true Church, with an hereditary priesthood after the Jewish pattern. Such may look with unconcealed contempt upon a feeble company who seek to obey Christ's Word, but the time will come when they will be compelled to recognise that the love and approval of Christ rests upon those that they despise.

Thus in this Philadelphian remnant there is a complete absence of everything that makes a show in the eyes of the world; while there is that which is exceedingly precious in the eyes of the Lord — "I have loved thee." In connection with this Church there is no mention of any great labour as in Ephesus; no mention of charity, and service, as in Thyatira; there is no great ecclesiastical system that men can take account of, as in Sardis. In the sight of men all is weakness that calls forth their contempt. Nevertheless, the very weakness that men deride secures the support of the Lord; and the moral traits of Christ, that raise the opposition of Satan, makes this little remnant very precious in the sight of Christ and very dear to His heart.

(V. 10). Furthermore, if this feeble remnant is preserved from the present opposition of Satan, they will also be kept out of the hour of trial that will come upon all the world. The fact that the Lord can say to Philadelphia, "Thou hast kept the word of My patience," would suggest that with the recovery of the full truth of the Church there had been a revival of the hope of the Church — the coming of the Lord to reign in glory. In the present time the form that the coming Kingdom takes is "the Kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ." Such wait for the Kingdom and manifestation of Jesus Christ; and Christ waits, seated on His Father's throne, until His enemies are made His footstool. Those who keep the word of His patience enter into the truth of Christ's present waiting attitude. They know this is the waiting time, they look forward to the reigning time.

Between the waiting, and the reigning, there has to come the hour of trial that will overtake the habitable world. These saints who keep the word of Christ's patience, are taught that the Church will be kept out of the hour of trial. How this will be we learn from other Scriptures. The word of Christ by revelation to the Apostle Paul tells of the rapture, by which the Church will be taken out of the scene of the trial to be with Christ, and thus come with Him when He appears to reign.

While it is specially said, in connection with these saints, that they will be kept from the hour of trial, it is equally true that every saint of the present time, will be kept from the coming world-wide judgments. In the same way it is surely true that no saint will be hurt of the second death, and yet this promise is only stated in connection with the overcomer in Smyrna. The fact being these promises are true for all believers; yet particular saints are especially reminded of certain promises that are suitable for their comfort and encouragement in their peculiar circumstances.

(V. 11). There follows a further word of encouragement and warning. "Behold," says the Lord, "I come quickly; hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." In the presence of those who oppose, the Lord encourages this remnant with the thought of His near coming. It will not be long that they will have to face opposition and endure conflict — He is coming quickly. The time is short; let them see to it that they hold fast and do not surrender that which has been recovered to them, nor give up in the conflict, in the last moments before the Lord returns. The very warning to hold fast, implies that an effort will be made to induce them to let go that which they have. They must not be surprised if they are tempted in different ways to surrender the truths of Christ's word recovered to them, and to abandon the place of separation from the corruptions of Thyatira and

Sardis.

Further, the warning indicates that they are faced with the grave danger of not holding fast, and thus of losing their crown. It is not simply "a crown," that they are in danger of losing, but "thy crown" — that is, their own distinguishing crown. The distinction of the Philadelphians is, that they cherish the truths concerning Christ and the Church in a day when, on every hand, these truths are denied. Having returned to the apprehension and practice of the truths concerning Christ and the Church, their ever present danger is, that they may surrender these truths and be drawn aside into the surrounding corruption, unreality, and self-sufficiency of Christendom. Hence the exhortation is, "Hold fast." Every effort of Satan will be made to lead the Philadelphian to give up what has been so blessedly revived to him. The enemy will gladly plead the help of saints, and the need of sinners, if by so doing he can get the Philadelphian to abandon what he has. He will argue, "There are a few saints in Sardis who have not defiled their garments, and there are needy sinners in Laodicea who are poor, and blind, and naked. Go into Sardis to help those saints; go into Laodicea to reach those sinners." Nevertheless, to go back under any plea to that which the Lord condemns, is to abandon that which the Lord approves. All the seductions of the enemy are met by the Lord’s warning words, "Hold fast." If the Philadelphian "holds fast," the Lord will doubtless open doors to help His people wherever they may be, and meet the need of sinners wherever found. Does not the exhortation to "hold fast" suggest that times of revival may be followed by times of declension in which many may drift and lose their crown. Blessed indeed, to be a Philadelphian, but Philadelphia is no haven of refuge where saints can settle down, but rather a company blessed with the approval of Christ, and for this reason, the special object of the enemy’s attacks, and hence there is the constant need to contend for the faith, and "hold fast" that which has been received.

(V. 12). In common with the other Churches there is in Philadelphia a promise to the overcomer. The mention of an overcomer might seem remarkable, seeing that in this Church the Lord finds nothing to condemn. There is, however, opposition to overcome, and the necessity of holding fast would imply overcoming the temptation to give up.

Very precious are the promises to the overcomer. The one who remains true to Christ in the dark days of the Church’s history; who is content to remain in obscurity, with but a little strength, in the day when the Church is growing unto an holy temple in the Lord, will become a pillar in the Church when the temple of God is complete. If, in a day when the Christian profession is competing for the power and approval of the world, any are content with the secret approval of the Lord; if they keep His word when religious profession is making everything of man’s word; if in such a day they set His Name above every name, then in the day of glory He will put upon them the name of His God, the name of the city of His God, and His own new Name. If they do not deny that Name in the day when men only profess the Name to dishonour it, they will wear His Name in the day of glory when all the world will have to bow the’ knee at the name of Jesus.

(V. 13). The address closes with the usual exhortation to the one that hath an ear to hear, to heed what the Spirit says to the Churches. There may be nothing to condemn in this Church, nevertheless, it is incumbent upon the Philadelphians to hear what the Spirit has to say to the other, Churches as well as to themselves. If they are to have the mind of the Lord they must heed the message of the Lord to each of the Churches. No attention to what the Spirit has to say in one

particular Assembly can absolve from responsibility to hear and act upon His ministry and administration in other Assemblies.

Laodicea.

Revelation 3:14-22. In the address to Thyatira we have, under the figure of Jezebel, the prophetic announcement of the uprising of a great ecclesiastical system that would seek to rule the Christian profession. History plainly shows the fulfilment of this prophecy, in the development of the Papacy in the Middle Ages. Today this system still exists. In Sardis we see another ecclesiastical system which was formed by men as a protest against the Papal system; and though marked by outward orthodoxy, is characterised by spiritual death. This system also has its present-day existence.

Thus before men there are these two great ecclesiastical systems — the Papal system, including the Greek Church, finding its extreme expression in Rome; and the Protestant system embracing the National Churches and the Nonconformist sects. In the eyes of the world every professing Christian belongs to one system or the other. In the address to Philadelphia we see a remnant of God’s people that have the approval of the Lord, in separation from the corruptions of Thyatira and Sardis. Thus we see a state which exists under the eye of the Lord, but presents no distinct ecclesiastical existence before men. When we come to the last Church we find, in contrast to Philadelphia, a state that is wholly abhorrent to the Lord, though like Philadelphia it does not appear before men as a definite ecclesiastical system apart from the Papacy and Protestantism.

Thus we conclude that before the world there are the two great ecclesiastical systems represented by Thyatira and Sardis. Before the Lord there is a remnant in Thyatira, a remnant in Sardis, a Philadelphian remnant apart from Thyatira and Sardis, and lastly the terrible condition, set forth by Laodicea, into which the great mass will fall who, apart from these remnants, form the Papal and Protestant systems.

(V. 14). The Lord presents Himself to Laodicea in a way that utterly condemns the condition of the Church; and yet is of the greatest encouragement to the overcomer. He is "The Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God." As the Amen, He is the One in whom all the promises of God have been taken up and affirmed in all their bearings, to bring to pass every good, and overthrow every wrong, and eternally glorify God in so doing. As the Faithful Witness, He was ever loyal to the One who sent Him. He loved the Father, and came to do the Father’s will. Whatever the cost to Himself, He never deviated from that will, and never flinched from carrying it out. In doing that will He proved Himself to be the beginning of the creation of God which, in all its vast extent, will be marked by the will of God. In the perfection of His way as the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the beginning of the creation of God, He eclipsed all others. He was fairer than the children of men. And yet alas! He who should have been exclusively before the Church as the One beyond compare, is the very One who is excluded by the Church of the Laodiceans, and treated with callous indifference. The Church was set to shine for Christ; to bear witness to the grace of God; and exhibit the qualities of the new creation. Alas! it has failed in all its responsibilities. It should have shone for Christ, in a dark world, by pointing to Him as the One in whom all the promises of God have their complete fulfilment — that He is the Yea and the Amen, and that every blessing that God has for man is found in Him. Then indeed, the Church was set in the world to be a faithful and true witness to the grace of God. Alas! so far from being a witness to grace, in the last stage of her history the great mass are strangers to grace, and even opposed to

God.

Lastly, the Church should have been the "firstfruits of His creatures," exhibiting the fruits of new creation, — "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance" (James 1:18; Galatians 5:22-23; Galatians 6:15). How little are these new creation fruits to be found in the professing Christian circle! Is not Christendom marked by hatred, misery, and war, rather than "love, joy, and peace"? Alas! is it not true, nothing on the face of the whole earth is so diametrically opposed to God as unconverted Christendom?

Thus we learn, in the way Christ presents Himself to the Church of Laodicea, the way in which the Church should have represented Christ before the world.

(Vv. 15, 16). So absolutely has the Church failed in its witness for Christ, that, in the last stage, the Lord can find nothing to commend: All He finds is a state that is utterly nauseous to Him. He says, "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot." The Lord sees a condition that has neither the coldness of death, as in Sardis, nor the warmth of devotion, as in Philadelphia. There is that which, in His sight, is more hopeless to man, and more dishonouring to Himself than the coldness of death; for the Lord can say, "I would thou wert cold or hot." He sums up this condition, in its last phase, in the solemn words, "Thou art lukewarm." What is this but indifference to Christ, and, what is always linked with indifference, toleration of evil? In the last phase of Christendom there are those who take the name of Christ, and make a profession of Christianity, but, when tested by the great question, "What think ye of Christ?" are found to be utterly indifferent to Him. The improvement of man, the uplifting of the masses, the betterment of social conditions will deeply interest them, but the glad tidings concerning Christ, the interests of Christ, the people of Christ, awaken within them but a languid interest, and to Christ, Himself, they are wholly indifferent. As long as people are sincere, charitable and respectable, the Laodicean cares not what they believe concerning Christ. His deity may be denied, and His perfect Manhood defamed; the Laodicean is quite indifferent. The atonement may be set aside, the inspired words of Christ denied, the coming of Christ made a matter for scoffing, and yet all is of the utmost indifference to the "broad-minded," easy-going, lukewarm Laodicean.

Such a condition is absolutely nauseous to Christ. The Lord expresses His abhorrence by warning this Church that the end will be their final and complete rejection as a Church. He says, "I will spue thee out of My mouth."

(V. 17). There is, however, further condemnation, for, linked with indifference to Christ there is the most arrogant assumption and self-satisfaction. Laodicea says, "I am rich, and increased with goods and have need of nothing." Though indifferent to Christ the Laodicean Church is full of herself and her claims. The Church that was left here to witness for Christ, has fallen to such depths that it not only ceases to witness for Christ, but it commences to witness to itself. The Church ceases to speak of Christ, and talks about the Church. The Assembly is made much of, and Christ is belittled. The Assembly seeks to attract to herself and not Christ. It usurps the place of Christ by claiming to be the vessel of riches and grace. Christ is outside, and yet it can say, "I have need of nothing."

Such then is the condition of the Laodicean Church, indifferent to Christ, self-occupied, and self-satisfied; and yet withal utterly ignorant of its true condition before the Lord. "I know," the Lord

can say, but, "Thou knowest not." In their own estimation, the Laodicean had need of nothing, in the sight of the Lord they needed everything, for He has to say, "Thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

(V. 18). Having exposed their terrible condition the Lord gives them counsel. He says, "I counsel thee to buy of Me;" words which show their need of Christ and that there is no blessing apart from Christ. They must come to Christ for true riches. What grace that invites, not simply sinners confessed, but these self-occupied, self-satisfied professers to come to Himself! Does it not blessedly set forth the attitude of grace that Christ still takes toward the Christless profession? They profess to have riches, so the Lord taking them up on their own ground, invites them to come and buy. The only cost will be the letting go of their own self-righteousness, for, after all, the positive blessings that the Lord has to dispense are without money and without price.

They are invited to buy "gold tried in the fire," speaking of divine righteousness secured through the judgment of the Cross; "white raiment," speaking of practical righteousness, that, so clothed the shame of their nakedness does not appear. Their lack of practical righteousness before men was a solemn proof of their lack of divine righteousness before God. "By their fruits ye shall know them" (Matthew 7:15-20). Further, they need the eye-salve that they may see, speaking of the anointing of the Spirit that enables us to see our need of Christ, as well as the perfection of His Person and work to meet our need, and to supply us with true wealth and suitability to the glory of God.

(V. 19). The Lord, however, is not consent with speaking to the consciences of these lukewarm Laodiceans. He will seek to reach the heart of any true believer that may still be found in Laodicea. He says, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent." The Church had long since left first love; but the Lord never left His first love for the Church. No longer can He speak of their love, yet He can still speak of His love. It is not, however, the love of complacency, but a love that has to act in rebuke.

(V. 20). Further, the Lord lingers in grace at their door. He speaks to the conscience: He appeals to the heart: He stands at the door: He knocks at the door. There is the call to repentance; but there is no expectation that the mass will repent, for this last appeal is only to the individual. "If any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him and he with Me."

Such is the last stage of the Church’s history on earth. That which was set to bear witness for Christ on earth, becomes a witness to its own wretchedness, and shuts Christ outside its door. In the condition of Laodicea, do we not see the full result of the first departure in Ephesus? The beginning of all departure was leaving first love to Christ; the end, total indifference to Christ in a Church that is well content to have Christ outside its door. The last stage of Christendom, that with calm indifference shuts the door on Christ, seems almost worse in its callousness than the last stage of Judaism that, in its hostility, nailed Christ to a Cross.

Even as Christ lingered over corrupt Judaism with tears, so He waits outside the door of Christendom with infinite patience, if perchance there is "any man" in the Christian profession that will open the door to Him. For the mass there is no hope; it is about to be spued out of His mouth; but until that solemn act of final rejection comes to pass, there is this loving invitation held out to

the individual who will listen to the voice of Christ. If there is one whose conscience has been reached by the Lord's exposure of Christendom, who has been aroused by His warnings, who has listened to His counsel, and been touched by His love, let that one but open the door and, even at this last stage, Christ will come in to him, and sup with him and he shall sup with Christ. What is this but the sweet communion of first love? Does it not prove that in the last stage of the Church's history on earth, when judgment is about to fall upon the great mass of the profession, it is possible for the individual to be brought back to first love? The Lord does not speak of any recovery of public witness to Himself, but of secret communion with Himself.

(V. 21). To the overcomer there is the promise of sitting with Christ on His throne, even as Christ also has sat down with the Father in His throne. The one who overcomes the indifference of Laodicea and opens the door to Christ, in the day when the great mass have closed the door upon Christ, will enjoy, not only secret communion with Christ, in the day of His rejection, but will be associated with Christ in display in the day of His glory. Christ overcame a world that rejected the Father, and has sat down on His Father's throne; the one who overcomes a world that has rejected Christ will sit down with Christ on His throne.

(V. 22). The address closes with the appeal to the one with the hearing ear. Well for us to pay heed to what the Spirit says to the Church of Laodicea, for does it not set forth a condition that may develop even among the Philadelphians? But for the grace of God, the very light and privileges that are given, may lead to Laodicean self-complacency. May we have the needed grace to hear what the Spirit has to say to the Churches.

S. The Appearing.

The Appearing.

Hamilton Smith.

(Extracted from Scripture Truth Vol. 42, 1965-7, pages 65-70) When the history of the world is closed, it will be found that the two events in time which incomparably transcend all others, are the first coming of Christ in humiliation, and the second appearing of Christ in glory.

It is on the second coming of Christ to earth, to reign in glory, that we desire to dwell. This great event is not the mere dream of a few visionaries, but the sober truth of the Word of God. Many Christians may be ignorant of this truth, the pulpits of Christendom may often pervert it, or, be altogether silent as to it, but, in spite of ignorance, neglect, and perversion, the second appearing of Christ is clearly foretold by God as the next great event in the history of the world. This great truth has a much larger place in the Word of God than many believers are aware. The Old Testament prophecies are full of glowing descriptions of the glories of the reign of Christ that will be ushered in by the Second Appearing. In the New Testament it has a prominent place in every Gospel: it is proclaimed in the Acts, and has a large place in the Epistles and the Revelation.

First, it will be well to examine some Scriptures that establish the great fact of the Second Appearing.

Secondly, we may seek from Scripture, the main reasons why the appearing is kept so prominently before us.

1. SCRIPTURES THAT PRESENT THE TRUTH OF THE APPEARING In Hebrews 9:26-28, we find the two appearings of Christ presented in one passage. First, we read that, "In the consummation of the ages hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself". When the trial of man, during the ages, was completed and all men were proved to be under sin, there dawned that great day when Christ appeared in humiliation to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself on the Cross.

Secondly, we read He is going to "appear the second time", not to take up the sin question, but for the salvation, or full deliverance of His people from every pressure and opposing power under which they may be held.

Here then, we have the first and second appearings of the Lord Jesus. All who are subject to the Word of God must admit that this passage clearly establishes the great fact that Christ is going to appear the second time in this world.

It will however, be well to turn to passages in other Epistles, that show that the Apostles Paul, and Peter, and John, all unite in setting before the believer the appearing of the Lord Jesus, as the glorious prospect which is to govern the believer in His path, and sustain him amidst his sorrows and trials.

First, the testimony of the Apostle Paul. In Titus 2:11-13, we again have two appearings brought before us. In verse 11 we read, "the grace of God . . . hath appeared"; and in verse 13 believers are said to be "looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ". Thus we have the appearing of grace, and the appearing of glory. The glory is going to appear where the grace appeared. Grace leads to glory. This passage does not speak of the believer appearing in glory in heaven; but of the glory appearing on earth. At the present it is the glory of man, such as it is, that appears: in yet a little while it will be the glory of God. Grace brings to us salvation. Being saved, grace teaches us how to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in view of the coming glory. The appearing of the glory of Christ is to govern the life.

Turning to 1 Timothy 6:14, we find a certain charge given to Timothy which he is exhorted to keep, "without spot, unrebukable until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ". In the early part of the chapter the Apostle has been speaking of the evils of the flesh — pride, envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings (verse 4); hurtful lusts, and covetousness (verses 9, 10). Then addressing himself to the man of God, he says, in verse 11, "flee these things". Moreover, we are not only to flee evil, but we are to follow good; so the Apostle says, follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness of spirit. Furthermore, we are reminded that there is something to fight for. Men are engaged in fighting, in a carnal way, for material advantages. This is a poor fight, in view of this life. We are to fight the good fight to maintain the truth, in view of eternal life.

Thus the charge can be summed up by these three words, flee, follow and fight. Nor must we forget that fighting comes last. It is useless to attempt to fight for the truth unless we are fleeing from evil, and following good. Then, indeed, we can fight for the truth. Fighting without fleeing and following, will only end in defeat. This charge is to be kept, not simply in view of death or going to heaven, but in view of coming out with Christ at "the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ" on earth, for, only then shall we receive the recompense for the responsible life here below with all the suffering, sorrowing, and toil involved in the fleeing, following, and fighting. Again, it is not in view of producing great results down here. We may see little present result from fleeing, and following, and fighting; at times we may grow weary in the fight, but let us seek to keep the charge, for it will have a glorious answer at the appearing.

Turning on to 2 Timothy 4:1-2, a further charge also enforced by the appearing of Christ Jesus. There we read, "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ who shall judge the quick and the dead, and by His appearing, and His kingdom. Preach the Word, be urgent in season, out of season; convict, rebuke, encourage, with all longsuffering and doctrine" (New Translation). Here Timothy has a charge to preach with urgency, in season and out of season. Two things will give him "urgency". First the judgment that will come upon those who refuse the gospel, and secondly, the glorious results for those by whom it is received at the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here, too, the appearing is linked with the Kingdom of Christ, for the appearing introduces the Kingdom.

Further, there is one more passage in this chapter, in which Paul speaks of the appearing. In verses 6-8, he refers to himself. The aged Apostle sees that the time of his departure is at hand. He has been exhorting Timothy to fight the good fight, and what he preached to others he practised himself. So here he says, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith". And as he looks on to the bright future, he sees that the Lord has laid up for him a

crown of righteousness. While he had been laying out his life for the Lord, the Lord had been laying up a crown for him. He had walked the way of righteousness (2 Timothy 2:22); and followed the instruction of righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16); and he looks forward to wearing the crown of righteousness. But when will he wear the crown? "At that day". And when is that day? Was it at the day of death, or the day of martyrdom, or the day when his happy spirit took its flight to be with Christ? Ah no! It will be the day of the glorious appearing of Christ on earth. When Christ comes forth crowned with many crowns, then Paul will have his crown, and not only Paul, but all those also who "love his appearing". Loving His appearing supposes that we are living in a way that is suited to His appearing. We should hardly love the thought of His appearing if not walking in the way of righteousness. Immediately he speaks of some who did not follow righteousness. Demas turned back to the world; he did not flee these things. Alexander, did the apostle "much evil"; he did not follow good. Then we read in the presence of opposition "all men" forsook Paul; they did not fight the good fight (10, 14, 16).

Secondly, the testimony of the Apostle Peter. In 1 Peter 1:1-25, the Apostle reminds believers that we have an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in the heavens for us (verse 4).

Then, in the fifth verse, he tells us that, as we pass on our way to the inheritance we are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. However, in the present time, says the Apostle, "ye are in heaviness through manifold trials". Still God’s people are often put to grief through manifold trials, and for our comfort, the Apostle tells us three things in reference to these trials (verse 6).

First, says the Apostle, they are only "For a season". In Hebrews 11:25, we read that the pleasures of sin are only for a season. The pleasures of the world and the sorrows of the saints are only for a season.

Secondly, Peter says there is a needs be. There is never a trial, or a sorrow, that we pass through small or great, but what there is a need for it. Our Father does not willingly afflict His children, or cause a needless tear. We may not always understand the way He takes, nor understand the need of the trial: some day we shall know. The Lord may have to say to us as He said to Peter. "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." In that hereafter we shall see all things clearly, and we shall sing, "With mercy and with judgment, My web of time He wove: And aye the dews of sorrow Were lustered with His love.

Thirdly, to comfort us in our sorrows we are told that all the trials of the present will have a glorious answer in a day that is to come. Now it is the trial of faith, then it will be the reward of faith, when the trials will be found unto praise and glory and honour. But when will this day be? The day of death, or the day when we go to heaven? Ah no! It will be at the appearing of Jesus Christ (verse 7).

Thirdly, the testimony of the Apostle John.

Turning to 1 John 3:1-3, we are reminded by the Apostle of the manner of the love the Father has bestowed upon us. It is not simply the fact of the love that John brings before us; but the greatness of the love which is seen in bringing us into the place of children. The world cannot see we are the children of God. It does not know us as such because it knew Him not. If the world could not see

that that blessed lowly man, with all His infinite perfection, was the Son of God, there is little wonder that they cannot see that poor feeble failing people like ourselves are the children of God. However, they will see, but at present it doth not yet appear what we shall be. Now we look much like other men with the marks of age, and care, and disease upon us; but wait a little; in God's good time we shall come out in the likeness of Christ. When will this be? Not when we die, or go to heaven: but, says John, "When He shall appear we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is.

These passages suffice to show that the Holy Spirit used the Apostles Paul, and Peter, and John, to manifest that the present life is to be governed by the prospect of the second appearing of Christ in glory.

2. THE RESULTS OF THE APPEARING

We may ask, Why is so much made of the second appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ in Scripture, rather than of the fact of our going to heaven. The Second Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians, and chapter 1, gives us three definite reasons for the importance of the Appearing. First, it will be the day of retribution for this world. Secondly, it will be the day of rest and recompense for the people of God. Thirdly, it will, above all, be the day of Christ's triumph, the glorious answer to His lowly path of humiliation.

1. The appearing is the day of retribution for the world. For long centuries God in mercy has remained a silent, though not indifferent, witness to the progress of evil in the world that has rejected, and still rejects, the Christ of God. When, however, God at last intervenes it will be in flaming fire taking vengeance on the wicked. People ask, Why does God not publicly intervene in the affairs of men? Why is war, wickedness, and corruption, allowed to go on? The answer is very obvious; it is of God's mercy that He does not directly intervene in the affairs of men; for, when He does, it must be to deal in judgment with all evil. For the moment God holds back the judgment, while in grace He proclaims forgiveness of sins to a world of sinners. But the day of grace hastens to its close, and will be followed by the direct intervention of God. This passage (2 Thessalonians 2:6-9), tells us that when God intervenes, three things will happen in regard to this world.

First, are there those who have persecuted God's people? Tribulation will be recompensed to such (verse 6). Secondly, are there those who "did not like to retain God in their knowledge", rejecting every creation testimony? (Romans 1:28). Vengeance will overtake them (verse 8). Thirdly, are there those who have added to their ignorance of God the positive rejection of the revelation of His grace, in the Gospel? They will be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power. But when will this take place? This same Scripture tells us plainly it will be at the appearing of Christ, for we read it will be "when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels".

2. The appearing will be the day of rest and recompense to the people of God.

Let us remember that during the centuries since the Cross, and indeed before the Cross, the history of God's people has been one long history of suffering, shame, and continual persecution in one part or another of this hostile world. From the death of Abel in antedeluvian days to persecution in our days, there has been little but opposition and tribulation for the people of God from a God-hating world.

Perhaps. no true estimate can be formed of the appalling number of Christians done to death under Pagan Rome; but it has been reckoned that under Papal Rome, and through other religious persecutions, over fifty million Christians have been hounded to death. Think what this means. Millions and millions of men, women and children abandoned to violence, outrage? martyrdom and massacre, in the most hideous forms that devilish hate and human ingenuity could devise. For the gratification of the holiday crowds of cultivated Rome, the Christians were thrown to lions by thousands. Disguised in the skins of wild beasts they were worried to death by dogs. Wrapped in pitch shirts they were impaled on stakes, and set on fire to illuminate Nero's garden parties. Later they were subjected to every form of agonising torture in the dungeons of the Inquisition. They were mutilated in the most revolting forms; they were stretched on the rack, they were buried alive, they were burned at the stake one by one, and they were massacred by tens of thousands. And then, as our minds travel back over this history of persecution, let us remember another fact, which at first sight seems so mysterious — there was no intervention of God. The tortures, the martyrdoms, the massacres, went on unceasingly, and God did not intervene. The world, the flesh and the Devil seemed to have it all their own way, and God, apparently took no notice. The agonising cries of God's tortured people went up to heaven, but the heavens were silent. Their hands were uplifted in prayer, but no deliverance came. Has God, then, been an indifferent spectator to the persecution of His people? Is He unmindful of their sorrows and their trials? Is He deaf to their prayers, and blind to their tears? A thousand times, No. The God that keeps a book for our names, and a bottle for our tears, and that has numbered the hairs of our heads, cannot remain unmoved by the sorrows of His people. Every tear they have shed, every sorrow they have passed through, every trial they have endured for Christ's sake, will have a glorious answer. The sorrows and trials are not forgotten, are not in vain, are not lost; for God says "they will be found unto praise, and honour, and glory". But when? "At the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:7). Millions of believers went out of the world amidst abuse, dishonour and shame. They will come back with praise and honour and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ, when He shall come to be glorified in His saints and admired in all them that believe. Therefore, says the Apostle, "You who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels (verse 7).

3 The appearing will be the day of Christ's triumph.

Incomparably the greatest event that the future holds for this world is the appearing of the Lord Jesus. In its vast importance it is only exceeded by the first appearing of Christ to accomplish the work of atonement. Let us gladly admit that the Cross stands in all its solitary dignity, unrivalled in time, and alone in eternity. The victories of man, that loom so large in the history of this world, will soon shrink into their own littleness, and pass into utter oblivion; but the mighty victory of the Cross will remain the one outstanding event in the history of the world. The glory of men's great victories fade even in time, and are forgotten in eternity; but time only adds fresh lustre to the Cross, and eternity will never cease to unfold its glories. But, while remembering the unique glory of the Cross, let us not forget the coming glory of the Kingdom which will be ushered in by the second appearing of the Lord Jesus. It will be the triumphant answer to His first appearing in humiliation. It will be God's answer to all the shame, insult, and indignities, that the world heaped upon the Son of God at the Cross. In the midst of those insults the Lord could look beyond all the shame, the suffering, and the sorrow, to the day of His coming glory, and utter these solemn and triumphant

words, "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven". He was crucified in weakness, He will come in power. At the Cross man crowned Him with a crown of thorns; at His appearing He will come forth crowned with many crowns. At the Cross, in righteousness He bore the judgment to make peace; at His second appearing, we read, in "righteousness He doth judge and make war". The Christ of God was last seen by man nailed to a cross between heaven and earth. The next time the world sees Christ He will be coming in the clouds, and "every eye shall see Him; and they also which pierced Him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him".

Then will be displayed the "glory of His power, when He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe" (2 Thessalonians 1:10).

Thus from this great passage we learn that the appearing of the Lord Jesus from heaven, with His mighty angels, will demonstrate before the whole universe, first, that God has not been indifferent to all the evil, corruption, and violence that has been accumulating through the ages; secondly, that God has not been unmindful of the sorrows of His people; and, thirdly, above all it will declare that God has not passed over the dishonour and insults that men have heaped upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

S. The Blessed Hope.

The Blessed Hope.

Hamilton Smith.

There is a very definite feeling amongst the people of God that the day of grace is about to close. In the words of the prophet we may say, "The day goeth away, for the shadows of the evening are stretched out." For the Christian, we may add, in the words of the Apostle, "The night is far spent, the day is at hand."

Even men of the world have a vague uneasy feeling that some great crisis is approaching. What form it will take, and how to meet it they know not. Christians, however, with the Bible in their hands. Christ in the heart, and the Holy Spirit to guide, are not left in darkness. They know that Christ is coming, and that His coming is very near. We realise in some measure the deep need of this sad world, and we know that all the efforts of men to meet that need will be in vain. Kings and Dictators, Parliaments and Committees, may for a time, and in some limited measure, relieve local distress, but they cannot remove the universal misery of a world under sin and death. Neither conferences and leagues, nor treaties and pacts, will end the sorrows of the Jew, the mis-government of the Gentile. nor the corruptions of Christendom.

There is only One who can deal with all the evil, end the sorrows of the earth. hush creation’s groan, maintain the glory of God, and bring in universal blessing for man. Whether realised or not, the great need of the Jew, the Gentile, and the Church, is the coming of Christ; as we sometimes sing, Lord, Lord Thy fair creation groans. The air, the earth, the sea In unison with all our hearts And calls aloud for Thee. The condition of the professing people of God, in these last closing moments, may well solemnise our hearts, and humble us in the dust. It is foreshadowed in the condition that existed among the people of God in the closing days of Old Testament history, for history has a strange way of repeating itself. At that time Israel had utterly broken down: the little remnant who had returned from captivity had completely failed. But in the midst of all the prevailing corruption there were a few godly souls who feared the Lord, thought upon His Name, and spake often one to another. One thing marked them above all else — they looked for the coming of Christ. They did not look for improvement in the world, they had no thought of seeking to put things right in Israel; they made no pretension to be anything themselves, but they looked for the Son of righteousness to arise with healing in His wings. Their only hope was the coming of Christ. Amongst themselves all was weakness; behind them all was failure; around them all was corruption; but before them stretched the glory to be ushered in by the coming of Christ. Their position, in very many ways, sets forth that of the people of God today. The Jew has crucified his Messiah, and has been scattered over the world; the Gentile has so utterly broken down in government, that civilization seems on the verge of being lost in a welter of lust and violence; the Church has utterly failed in its responsibility as a witness for Christ; and those who, in the midst of the ruin, have sought to answer to the mind of God, have utterly broken down. The failure on man’s side, is absolute and irretrievable. But our only hope remains Christ is coming; and in spite

of all the failure behind us, and around us, the glory lies before us.

If then the coming of Christ is the great hope that is set before us for our special encouragement and comfort, in a day of ruin, we shall do well to examine Scripture. not with the vain idea of attempting to fix a date for the coming, or indulging the fleshly love of prying into the future, but with the desire of having our affections awakened towards the One who is coming.

First let us turn to Scriptures which establish the great facts that the Lord Jesus is coming to reign in glory, and that when He comes His saints will come with Him. Then we may look at Scriptures that tell us how the saints will be brought to Christ, in order to come with Him.

Turning to the last Epistle in the New Testament we find we are carried back by Jude to the first Book in the Bible, to learn that in less than seven hundred years after the Creation of man the world had become apostate. In the days of Enoch the world was approaching the great crisis of the Flood. No hope was held out of any recovery of an apostate world; but, in view of the judgment to come we have the first great prophecy of the coming of Christ. Enoch says, "Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousand of His saints" (Jude 1:14). The world passes on to judgment, the saints are preserved to come with Christ in glory.

Passing on to the prophet Zechariah, who prophesied in the day of Israel’s ruin at the close of the Old Testament history, we find he holds out no hope of the recovery of the nation: but, in view of another great crisis. there is again held out before the saints the hope of the coming of Christ. The prophet says, "The LORD my God shall come, and all the saints with thee" (Zechariah 14:5). Again the world passes on to judgment. but the saints are preserved to come with Christ.

Now may we listen to the testimony of the Apostle John, as declared in Revelation 19:11-16? His prophetic utterances close the witness of the New Testament. John speaks in view of another great crisis in the history of the world — the complete break down of the nations and of Christendom. As in the days of Enoch before the close of the Old World, and as in the days of Zechariah before the close of the Old Testament, so in the days that will close the course of this present world, we learn there is no hope but in the coming of Christ, and that when the "heaven is opened," and the "King of kings" comes forth, the armies of heaven will follow Him. Thus again we learn that the present world rolls or to judgment, but the saints are preserved to come with Christ. To anyone subject to the Word of God these Scriptures, with many others that might be cited, definitely prove that the Lord Jesus is coming to earth the second time, in power and glory, and when He comes His saints will come with Him. Seeing, however, that from the beginning of history to the present day, generations of saints have passed away, and their bodies have been laid in the grave, and that, at the present moment, millions of believers are living on the earth, while Christ is in heaven, the question naturally arises, How will the saints join Christ to come with Him? This important question was allowed to be raised very early in the history of the Church, that we might have an inspired answer through the Apostle Paul. His first Epistle to the Thessalonians was written to give us the answer. In the first chapter of this Epistle we are told that these Thessalonian saints had been "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven . . . even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come." When Christ appears the second time it will be in wrath, or judgment, upon the nations that have rejected Him; but with complete deliverance for His people who have suffered persecution for His name’s sake. These Thessalonian saints were sustained in the midst of their persecutions by rightly looking forward to

a glorious answer to all their sufferings at the appearing of Christ, when they would share with Him in the glories of the Kingdom. This hope will not be disappointed; but as time passed on, and the coming of Christ was delayed, some of their number "fell asleep." This troubled them with the thought that possibly the saints who had passed away, would miss all the blessings and glories of the reign of Christ, that would be enjoyed by those who were alive on earth when Christ appeared. They probably had no question as to their eternal blessing, or that they would enjoy the heavenly blessings of the Father's house, but they feared they would miss the Kingdom glories. The Apostle meets this difficulty in the fourth chapter of the Epistle. He first sets their minds at rest in regard to those who had been taken from them. He would not have us ignorant "concerning them which are asleep" (verse 13).

These saints were in ignorance, and sorrow was the result of their ignorance. The Apostle wishes to dispel their darkness, and wipe away their tears. And the way he takes is the only effectual way of dispelling the clouds and ending the sorrow. He presents Christ. He reminds us that Jesus has died and is risen again; and that His death and resurrection is the great pattern of them that sleep. Christ's resurrection was secret; so, indeed, will be the resurrection of His sleeping saints. Just as we believe one, so we can believe the other. Unknown to the world they will be raised again in order that God may bring them with Jesus (1 Thessalonians 4:14).

Still the question remains, how will these risen saints, and how will the living saints, be brought to be with the Lord, so that they may come with Him? This question the Apostle proceeds to answer in the parenthetical verses, 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18. The Apostle stresses the importance of this passage by specially reminding us that he is speaking "by the Word of the Lord . ." We know that all his Epistles were inspired. but there are truths of such special importance that he introduces them with the reminder that he speaks by special revelation. The truth of the gospel, the truth of the Mystery, the Lord's Supper, and, in this passage, the truth of the Rapture of the saints, are all introduced in this way (Galatians 1:12; 1 Corinthians 11:23; Ephesians 3:3; 1 Thessalonians 4:15).

This, perhaps, is the only Scripture that directly tells us how we shall be taken to be with the Lord. There are, however, two other Scriptures to which we may profitably refer before examining this passage.

First, 1 Corinthians 15:51-53. In this chapter the great subject is resurrection. The coming of the Lord is riot actually mentioned, though we know, from 1 Thessalonians 4:1-18, that the events of which these verses speak, will take place at His coming. The Apostle says, "Behold I show you a mystery," and then he tells the secret that "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed." That we are coming with the Lord was no secret, for, as we have seen, Enoch and the prophets had spoken about this great event. But no prophet had ever hinted that a number of saints would never pass through death. This, indeed, was a secret reserved for the New Testament times. But if all will not pass through death, all will be changed. The sleeping saints will be "raised incorruptible," and the mortal bodies of the living will "put on immortality." The passage, however, does not go further. If we only had this Scripture we should not know into what likeness we are changed, nor what would happen to us when we are changed. This then is the first step in the great event that leads to our being with Christ. "We shall all be changed."

Passing on to the second Scripture, we read, in Php 3:20-21, that "we look for the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour who shall change our body of humiliation that it may be fashioned like unto His

body of glory." This Scripture throws further light on this momentous event. The Epistle to the Corinthians has told us we shall be changed. This passage tells us we shall be changed into the likeness of Christ. Not only shall we be morally like Him, but we shall have bodies of glory like His own. In the light of this revelation we may well ask ourselves, why this amazing grace? Why are poor sinners such as ourselves going to have these bodies of humiliation fashioned like His own glorious body? Ah! we know the answer, we are going to be like Him that we may be the everlasting witness to the worth of His Person and the efficacy of His work. Think of that poor degraded thief on the Cross, think of the proud Christ-hating Pharisee Saul of Tarsus; then pass on in thought to heaven and as, in the day to come, we gaze upon these men as glorified saints shall we not see the amazing efficacy of the work of Christ, that removes every trace of sin, and enables these men to be changed into the likeness of Christ. And what is true of these men will be true of all the saints in that vast scene of glory. When we come out in His likeness it will be according to the riches of His grace, and to the praise of the glory of His grace.

Thus we learn from Philippians that when changed it will be into the likeness of Christ, but this passage does not state what will happen to us when changed. For this further truth we must return to the fourth chapter of the First Epistle of Thessalonians. There, in verse 16, we read that "the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven." Here then we have the blessed intimation that the Lord is coming for us. The language is very explicit. It is not simply stated that the Lord shall descend, but that the Lord. Himself, shall descend. This is in accord with the Lord’s own words to His disciples. "I will come again and receive you unto myself." He will not be accompanied with the great host of His holy Angels as when He comes to earth. He will come alone to meet His saints, even, as in the beautiful type, Isaac goes forth alone at eventide to meet his bride as she comes up from her wilderness journey.

Then let us notice, it is not a descent to earth, as when He appears to reign, and His feet stand once again on the Mount of Olives. It truly says He will descend, but it very precisely says it is a descent from heaven, not a descent to earth.

Moreover, we are told, that at the moment of His coming there will be a triple summons. The assembling shout, the voice of the Archangel, and the trump of God. From 1 Corinthians 15:1-58, we know that the trump of God raises the sleeping saints. The voice of the Archangel does not imply that the Archangel is present, or that the Archangel speaks, as our translation might suggest. The true translation is "with an assembling shout, with archangel’s voice, and with trump of God." There is no article before Archangel and trump. It is simply characteristic of the Lord’s voice. He speaks in this way, with Archangel’s voice, and it may be this is the voice that changes the living saints, as the trump of God raises the dead. Then with an assembling shout He gathers both classes of saints together, and calls them to Himself.

Having assembled His saints we are caught up together. How blessed to know that, in this happy moment, so soon to come, all the things that have divided the saints will vanish away, and the humiliating divisions that have rent the Church of God, and scattered the people of God, will be for ever past. At last for one brief moment, it would seem, in the very scene of all the failure, His people will be together. For it will not be in little companies or groups of saints that we shall be taken. It will be no partial rapture by detachments, as some falsely teach today, for the word is "We . . . shall be caught up together."

Further, we learn that the meeting will take place in the air. Then how blessedly it all concludes, "So shall we ever be with the Lord." It is the Lord Who will bring us together, and the Lord Who will hold us together; never more to be divided from one another, never more to be separated from the Lord. "Wherefore," says the Apostle. "comfort one another with these words."

Here, then we have the mystery of His coming, the secret rapture of the saints by which they are taken from earth to meet Christ in the air, that they may be with Him when He comes.

Nevertheless, this great passage does not go beyond the meeting in the air. It is silent as to what happens after that wondrous meeting. Turning to the first three verses of John 14:1-31, we hear of a further stage in our journey to the glory of the Kingdom. Here the Lord tells us that He has gone to prepare a place for us in the Father's house, and that when He comes again it will be to receive us unto Himself. That meeting, we know from 1 Thessalonians 4:1-18, will take place in the air. Having received us to Himself, He will conduct us into the Father's house, as He so blessedly says, "that where I am, there ye may be also." He is leading us along the path of life which He Himself has trodden, and which leads to fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore in the Father's house. The last stage in the path to glory will be when Christ comes forth to, reign. At His first coming He came in humiliation, and in circumstances of weakness. At His second coming the heavens will open and He will come forth as the King of kings, and the Lord of lords. His mighty angels will accompany Him, the armies in heaven will follow Him, and, Enoch's prophecy will be fulfilled, "Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints."

These are the stages on our way to glory. First the meeting with the Lord in the air: then to pass in to the joys of the Father's house; lastly to come forth with Christ to share His Kingdom and His throne. This then is the blessed hope that lies before us; The joy of the Lord's presence, The fulness of the Father's house, and The glory of the everlasting kingdom.

We may add, in the great eternity beyond there lies the eternal state of the new heaven and the new earth where God will be all in all.

Seeing then that we wait for these coming glories, we may well say, "What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God."

S. The Blessing of Jacob.

The Blessing of Jacob.

Genesis 47:27-31;Genesis 48:1-22.

Hamilton Smith.

(Extracted from Scripture Truth magazine, Volume 17, 1925, page 4.)

During the first seventeen years of Joseph's life he was cared for by his father Jacob, and, with beautiful fitness the aged father during the last seventeen years of his life becomes the object of tender care on the part of the son (Genesis 47:28). At the end of this period we reach the last and brightest stage of Jacob's chequered path, the tranquil calm of his dying hours being in bright contrast to the stormy life through which he had pursued his crooked and self-willed way. To this holy and elevated scene Joseph is specially called, and in it he and his two sons have a peculiar place of privilege.

Jacob — the man of nature — is weakened by age and sickness. The world to which he had clung with such tenacity is fast fading from his view, his eyes being dim by reason of age (verse 10). But when the strength of nature is weakened, and the natural vision is dim — when all things earthly are fast slipping from his grasp — he rises above the loss of all earthly joys and finds in God his sole trust and unfailing resource. Hence it is that his mind travels back to that great moment at the commencement of his pilgrim path when God Almighty appeared to him at Luz in the land of Canaan, and there blessed him and gave the land to his seed for an everlasting possession on the ground of unconditional promise. The futile scheming, the mean shifts, and underhanded planning, that had so often marred his way are all passed over as of no avail; and for every hope for a far-reaching future he rests in the unconditional promise of God with which he commenced his journey (verses 3, 4). But if there is blessing on the ground of promise secured to Jacob's seed, then Jacob can claim a blessing for Joseph's sons. Jacob can say, "they shall be mine." He claims them as his seed and therefore as the heirs to the inheritance (verses 5, 6).

Then, reverting to his own history, he contrasts his earthly lot with the bright future of Joseph's sons (verse 7). He sees stretching before them, and their seed, a great inheritance in the land, but as for himself, all his earthly joys in the land of Canaan were ended with the death of his best-loved wife. Rachel was the loved object of his life. Rachel was the special object of his care at the ford Jabbok. Rachel's sons were loved above all his children. At Rachel's death love marked her burial place with a pillar to keep her name in perpetual remembrance. For Rachel he had suffered, toiled, and lived, and with her all earthly joys were closed for Jacob. It was as if he said to Joseph, "Your two sons have bright earthly prospects before them, but, as for me, mine were all buried in Rachel's tomb." But the faith of the dying patriarch looks beyond the end of all earthly joys; and the man who was for ever talking of going down to the grave — now that his feet reach the edge of the grave — looks beyond death and corruption, for if he speaks of Rachel's tomb "in the way of Ephrath," he significantly adds, "the same is Bethlehem." The very spot which closed

up the earthly joys and natural affections of Jacob's life is the place from whence would come the One who would bring in everlasting blessing for Jacob's seed. "Thou, Bethlehem-Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that is to be the ruler in Israel whose goings forth have been from old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2). One has said, "the tomb of Jacob's earthly hopes was the birthplace of his heavenly ones. Ephrath and Bethlehem were one and the same place. Death and resurrection go together in the counsels of God and the experience of His people. As surely as Ephrath does the work of death for us, so surely it will become a Bethlehem to us."

Jacob has spoken hitherto, but from this point in the story he speaks as Israel. Jacob the man of nature has recalled the past and seen the end of all his hopes in death, now as Israel (the prince with God) he will declare the mind of God. As Jacob he has seen death ending the plans of man. As Israel he looks beyond death and unfolds the purpose of God (verses 8-11). But the eyes of Israel were dim for age, so that he could not see (verse 10). If heavenly things are opening to him, earthly things are fading from him. And so it is he no longer thinks of the sorrows by the way, but of the goodness of God that had never forsaken him. He owns that God had been better to him than all his natural thoughts. He can say, "I had not thought to see thy face; and, lo, God hath showed me also thy seed." With the goodness of God filling his soul, Joseph and his two sons for the moment pass from his thoughts, and in the presence of God "he bowed himself with his face to the earth." He has reached the highest moment in his spiritual life — he is a worshipper. This, we know from the Holy Spirit's comment in Hebrews 11:1-40, was the crowning act of faith in the life of Jacob. "By faith," we read, "Jacob, when he was dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff." The scheming, the supplanting, the selfishness, and the independence that so often marred his path had passed away, and at last Jacob is marked by faith, dependence, and worship (verse 12). The result is very blessed. As a worshipper in the presence of God he learns the mind of God. He acts no longer as nature would dictate, but as God would direct. He crosses his hands "intelligently" (N. Tr.), placing the right hand on the younger and the left hand on the elder (verses 13, 14). Thereupon Jacob blesses Joseph, but does so by blessing his two sons, for the blessing that he pronounces is upon "the lads." He speaks of God according to his experience of God. It is the God that shepherded him all the days of his life — the Angel that had redeemed him from all evil — into whose hands he commends the lads (verses 15, 16). Joseph, allowing his natural thoughts to govern him, and not discerning the sovereignty of God that blesses according to His purpose, protests against Jacob giving preeminence to the younger son. Jacob, however, will not give way to Joseph's natural wishes. He is perfectly aware of the course he is taking. He can say, "I know it, my son, I know it." He is not only acting according to the mind of God, but he is doing so intelligently. His spiritual vision was never brighter than at the moment when his natural vision had become dim with age. Another has said, "There never was a man who saw more brightly than Joseph; but Jacob dying, sees the future with steadier, fuller gaze than the most famous interpreter of dreams and visions since the world began." In Genesis 49:1-33 we pass from the private scene between Jacob and his son Joseph and we have the closing moments of Jacob's life to which all his sons were summoned, though here again we shall find that Joseph has a pre-eminent place. The twelve sons of Jacob were the nucleus of the nation of Israel, and thus, under the guidance of God, Jacob uses their different characteristics to give a prophetic outline of the moral history of the nation, and God's purpose for the blessing of Israel through Christ, more especially setting forth the condition of the nation "in the

last days" that precede their entrance into blessing under the reign of Christ. The first three sons present by their characteristics the moral failure of Israel as a nation marked by corruption as exemplified in Reuben, and violence as expressed in Simeon and Levi. As such the nation would be rejected. God will not enter into their assembly or connect His honour with those marked by corruption and violence. It is not by such means that the purposes of God will be brought to pass (verses 3-7). The fulfilment of God's purposes is connected with Judah, for from Judah the King who wields the sceptre, and the Judge who administers the law, would arise, and the gathering of the people will be to Him (verses 8-12). The King, however, who arises from Judah will be rejected; so for a time the nation falls under the power of the Gentile set forth by Zebulon and Issachar. These two sons foretell how the nation would fall under the influence of the world through the pursuit of commerce, and willingly pay tribute to the world for the sake of ease (verses 13-14). In Dan we see that through this tribe the nation would fall, like a rider falling backwards. Dan is an instrument of Satan's power, bringing about the apostasy of the nation. But at the darkest moment of their history — when the mass fall under the power of Satan — there will be a remnant who look to the Lord and wait for His salvation (verses 16-18). When the remnant look to Jehovah for salvation, then the moment of deliverance is at hand, hence in Gad we have the great fact set forth that though the godly remnant may be overcome at first, and pass through great suffering, yet in the end they will overcome. Abundance of blessing for the nation will follow as set forth by the "royal dainties" of Asher (verses 19-20).

Moreover, the nation brought into liberty will break forth in praise as seen in Naphtali, "the hind let loose," and the "goodly words" he giveth (verse 21). This necessarily brings us to Joseph, a beautiful picture of the One through whom all the blessing will be brought in. As in his history he sets torte Christ in His supremacy, so in the dying words of Jacob he is the son that is chosen to set forth Christ personally. Christ is the fruitful bough. Jehovah sought for fruit from Israel, but found the nation to be but a barren vine. But in Christ there is fruit for God and blessing for man. Not only by "a well," speaking of one favoured spot, "the land of Israel," but blessing that runs "over the wall" to the far-off Gentile. But the One through whom all the blessing comes was once "sorely grieved" by the archers who shot at and hated Him. He was the rejected one of his brethren. But the One rejected by His own is made strong by the mighty God of Jacob, and "from thence" is the Shepherd the Stone of Israel. "From thence" — from the place of weakness — He is exalted to a place of strength; from the place of death where He was "shot at" He is brought again from the dead, as Joseph was brought from the pit, to be the "great Shepherd of the sheep" (Hebrews 13:20). And "the stone which the builders cast away as worthless, the same is made the head of the corner" (1 Peter 2:7, N. Tr.). The rejected but exalted Christ becomes the source of blessing far exceeding all known blessings, for He will bless "with the blessings of heaven above" in addition to the blessings of the deep "that lieth under." Blessing that will far exceed any blessing that the nation has enjoyed in the past. Moreover, the blessing will reach beyond the land "unto the utmost bounds of the everlasting hills." Furthermore, the boundless blessing that will fill this world of bliss will be to the glory and exaltation of the once-rejected Christ — a crown of glory to Him that was once separate from his brethren (verses 22-26).

Finally, in Benjamin we have Christ brought before us as the victorious King of kings, delivering His people, destroying His enemies, and sharing with his people the fruits of His victory (verse 27).

S. The Breaches in the Wall.

The Breaches in the Wall.

Isaiah 22:5-14.

Hamilton Smith. This passage depicts a dark day in the history of Jerusalem. It was "a day of trouble" and "perplexity." The walls of the city were broken down and the enemy was "at the gate." The inhabitants of Jerusalem saw their choice valleys filled with chariots, and the horsemen of their enemy at the gate. To defend themselves they looked "to the armour of the house of the forest." They saw also "the breaches of the city of David," and made the most desperate efforts to stop the breaches, even breaking down the houses to fortify the walls.

Alas, in the day of their trouble, they missed the mind of the Lord, and this in a threefold way.

First, they entirely failed to see that the "trouble" and "perplexity" — the enemy at the gate and the breaches in the wall — were "by" or "from the Lord God of Hosts." They overlooked the first great cause of all their trouble and, looking merely at second causes, could only see that an enemy had made the breaches. They did not see that the Lord was behind all, and that, in His righteous judgment He had allowed the enemies of Israel to make the breaches in the wall because of their sin and folly.

Secondly, though they made the most strenuous efforts to repair the breaches, yet, in their trouble and perplexity, they did not look to the Lord. The Lord has to say, "Thou didst look in that day to the armour" . . . "but ye have not looked unto the Maker thereof, neither had respect unto Him, that fashioned it long ago."

Thirdly, the Lord called "to weeping and to mourning," and instead they abandoned themselves to feasting and drinking, for they said, "Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die." They pursued their course, as if all would be well, with utter indifference as to results and without a thought as to the future. In this, the close of the Christian dispensation, the people of God again find themselves in "a day of trouble" and "perplexity," according to that word which tells us "in the last days difficult times shall come." We may truly say the enemy is at the gate ever seeking to break up and scatter the people of God, and our hands are weakened for resisting the enemy by reason of the breaches in the wall. Hence the words of the prophet still carry with them warning, as well as guidance, for those who are in a like condition, and who have ears to hear, for "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning that we through endurance and encouragement of the scriptures might have hope."

Before, however, we seek to apply the lessons of Isaiah 22:1-25, it may be well to take a general view of the condition in which the people of God find themselves today, and the distinct activities of the Spirit of God during the past four centuries. In this period there have been, we judge, THREE GREAT MOVEMENTS of the SPIRIT of GOD.

First, no true believer can ever cease to thank God for that mighty work of the Spirit in the early part of the sixteenth century by which we have gained an open Bible in a language to be understood, and the general knowledge of gospel truths by which the soul is saved and established in its individual relationships with God. The peace and religious liberty we enjoy today, we owe, under the good hand of God, to that noble band of reformers who in the face of deadly opposition, proclaimed the truths which in many cases cost them suffering, persecution, and a martyr's death.

We must not, however, make the Reformation the measure of divine truth. The movement, in the hands of men, essentially took a reforming character. It left believers associated together in reformed churches, but it in nowise attempted to gather believers after the pattern of the primitive Church. Indeed the question of the true nature and character of the Church was never directly raised by the Reformers. The Church was not in any true sense separated from the world; on the contrary, the reformation placed the Church, in general, under subjection to the State in order to free it from subjection to the Pope. The movement did not give Christ His place, in heaven, as the Head of the Church which is His body, nor did it give the Holy Spirit His place on earth as dwelling in and with believers as the House of God. National churches were instituted and, as it has been truly said, "Churches finding their limits in the circumference of the countries inhabited by those of whom they formed part, is that which the Word of God makes not the least allusion to. Such Churches cannot either in fact or in affection be the Bride of Christ. They are necessarily in relation with the country wherein they are formed. The unity of the body of Christ is lost to them." With the nationalisation of Churches there speedily set in the decay of vital power. The name and doctrines of Christianity were still adhered to as a creed, to which the natural man could subscribe, but only a few names left in the book of life (Revelation 3:5). The great reformation movement has resulted in a vast number that profess Christ with comparatively few that have life in Christ. The movement which, in the power of God, commenced so brightly soon degenerated in the hands of men, into a system of orthodox profession of which the Lord has to say, "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." At the dawn of the eighteenth century this lifeless profession had reached its deepest depths of darkness and decline. "Natural theology without a single distinctive doctrine of Christianity, cold morality, or barren orthodoxy, formed the staple teaching both in church and chapel. Sermons everywhere were little better than miserable moral essays utterly devoid of anything likely to awaken, convert, or save souls." But when all was at the worst there was amongst English speaking races, in the early part of the eighteenth century a second great movement of the Spirit of God, who wrought in mighty saving power. Evangelists were raised up to proclaim the glad tidings. Whitfield, Wesley, Grimshaw, Berridge and very many other earnest and devoted servants of the Lord went throughout the land warning sinners of judgment to come, arousing consciences to a sense of need, and bringing relief and salvation to thousands upon thousands through the preaching of Christ and Him crucified. We may truly thank God for this devoted band of preachers without shutting our eyes to the weakness of the movement in the hands of men. It is manifest that at its best it did not go beyond a gospel that aims to meet the need of man. It stopped short of that fuller gospel preached by the Apostle Paul that, entirely setting aside man in the flesh, links the believer with Christ in the glory, thus constituting the Christian a heavenly man. It brought blessing to the sinner, but left him in the world with the idea of making it a better and a brighter place. The result has been that worldliness, ecclesiastical and political, has become a prominent characteristic of the evangelical movement. In the sincere

desire to reach the masses, every endeavour has been made to popularise the truth and make it more or less attractive to the natural mind. Every effort has been made to impress the natural man by the aid of music and other human means. Hence the levity, and often even vulgarity, that so largely disfigures this movement in the present day. Moreover, another great weakness of the movement is its individualism. Its great aim and end is the blessing of individuals; it presents no true conception of the Church whether in its formation, its present administration or its future glory. All these essential truths of Christianity are entirely outside the scope of the Evangelical movement. Souls are truly converted, for which we may thank God, but the movement as such leaves the converted souls in the various religious systems of men.

Coming now to the early part of the nineteenth century we find a third movement of the Spirit of God. Between 1829 and 1830 a few devoted Christians in Dublin seceded from the established Church and met together, at first in a private way, to remember the Lord in the breaking of bread and for prayer and study of the Word. Very shortly, in different parts of the United Kingdom, others separated from the National Church and independent bodies, and met together in a similar way in simple faith in God without any human leadership. Taking the Scriptures as their only and sufficient authority and in dependence upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they speedily learned the great truths concerning "Christ and the Church" which had been lost to the Lord’s people from the days of the apostles They realized that Christ is the Head of the Church, and that all believers are members of one Body on earth united to the Head in heaven, and to one another, by the Holy Spirit. Having thus discovered the great central truth of the dispensation, at once every other truth received a fuller and deeper meaning. The gospel was seen and preached in its fulness. The prophetic Scriptures were opened up more fully and the coming of the Lord was seen to be the immediate hope of the Church. In connection with the revival of these truths there was a corresponding life of "good works" and separation from every form of worldliness.

It is, however, of the first importance to see the distinctive character of this movement. It was essentially a separative movement. Hitherto the true people of God had been held captive in the great religious systems of men whether Papal, National, or Nonconformist. Though converted they remained in these religious systems. Now, for the first time, large numbers were set free from the bondage of these man-made systems. The reason of this separating action of tbe Spirit of God is clear. The moment had at last come when God, in His mercy, was about to revive the truth concerning Christ and His Church. Anyone instructed, according to Scripture, will at once see that it was impossible to remain in connection with the systems of men, and, at the same time, hold and practice the truths concerning the Church whether viewed as the body of Christ or the House of God. It was indeed as with Israel of old; when the moment came to rebuild the House of God, it became an absolute necessity to set free a remnant of Israel from the mass of the nation in captivity, and bring them back to the Land, the true ground for God’s people in that day.

Moreover, as with Israel of old the adversary attacked, both by subtlety and open hostility, the little remnant that sought to build the House of the Lord, so the enemy set to work to mar the testimony of those who were once more seeking to walk according to the principles of the House of God. Alas! he has so far succeeded that this little remnant of God’s people, who were once united in the truth, have by numerous divisions, been scattered and broken up into various companies. What then we may ask has been THE CAUSE OF DIVISIONS?

We may well ask ourselves how is it that the enemy has been allowed to bring about these disastrous divisions among this little remnant of God's people? In order to understand the underlying causes of division let us remember there are two great facts on which hang all the distinguishing truths of Christianity which were recovered by this last movement of God. First that Christ is seated as Son of Man in the glory of God: second that the Holy Spirit as a Divine Person is dwelling in and with believers on the earth. We do not forget that every blessing enjoyed by the saints in this dispensation, as well as in the past and in the future, is secured by the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, but the particular blessings which belong exclusively to Christianity are secured by these two immense facts, only true in this dispensation, that there is a Man in the highest place in glory, and a Divine Person on earth. By the Holy Spirit believers on earth have been united to one another to form that mystic body of which Christ in heaven is the Head. Then, as we have already seen, these truths, and all that they involve, can only be known in power by those who have taken a place in separation from the great religious systems of men which, by their constitution, their teaching and their practice, are a denial of the truth of the Church as unfolded in Scripture. In the light of these truths we judge the root causes of all divisions will be found to lie in three solemn facts: —

1st. We have failed to walk in the Spirit.

2nd. We have not held the Head.

3rd. We have not maintained that holy separation without which it is impossible to act in accordance with these truths.

This, however, calls for further explanation. The movement of the last century to which we have referred was essentially a spiritual movement. The return, in any measure, to the principles and practice of the great truths of the Assembly, as unfolded in the epistles, was a return to ground on which there was no room for the activity and devices of religious flesh. It was ground which, being divine, could only be taken and maintained in the power of the Spirit. We cannot read the early chapters of the Acts without being struck by the fact that the Church on earth was not only formed by the Holy Spirit, but was maintained by men who were filled with the Holy Spirit, and acting in the power of the Spirit by spiritual means. On the day of Pentecost the disciples were all filled with the Holy Ghost and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. Brought before the rulers, Peter is filled with the Spirit when he confounds his opponents. Later we read "they were all filled with the Holy Ghost and they spake the word of God with boldness." To meet the temporal needs of believers, men were appointed full of the Holy Ghost. The adversaries of Stephen could not resist the Spirit by which he spoke, and at his martyrdom "he being filled with the Holy Spirit looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing on the right hand of God." From this rapid survey of these early scenes it is manifest that whether it was the formation of the Church, or the maintenance of the Church against the attacks of the enemy; whether it was preaching to sinners or ministering to the saints, all was one in the power of the Holy Spirit, and by men who were filled with the Spirit. There was an entire absence of all the religious machinery and carnal methods by which the varied religious systems of today seek to conduct their services and retain their hold on the people.

It must be plain that if all were walking in the Spirit, we should be perfectly joined together, in the same mind and in the same judgment. There would be no occasion for a divided judgment. There

may indeed be different apprehensions of divine truth, — some see farther than others, — but if controlled by the same Spirit all look in the same direction. There may be different views of the same object even as the gospels present different views of the life of Christ yet all are in perfect accord because presented by the same Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:4, 1 Corinthians 12:8-9, 1 Corinthians 12:11).

What then is the cause of strife and divisions? Does it not lie in the fact that in the Christian there are two opposing powers, the flesh and the Spirit, and these are contrary the one to the other. To be in agreement with one another we must be controlled by the same power If two Christians are controlled by the Holy Spirit they will be in accord. If both are controlled by the flesh they may be in accord. But if one is controlled by the Spirit and the other by the flesh there must be conflict, for "the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh." There must be strife when the flesh and the Spirit come into collision whether it be in an individual or in a company. (Galatians 5:17)

Now the movement to which we have referred called for and necessitated a spirituality for which the mass were not prepared. So it came to pass with the increase of numbers there was a decrease of spirituality. The flesh acted and fleshly methods crept in with the result that there was collision between those seeking to walk together in the line of the Spirit and those acting in a more fleshly way. It has been truly said "the more we investigate, the better we shall see that the cause of strife generally between any two Christians is, that one has allowed human considerations of some kind to sway him, while the other, with a more single eye, considers for the Lord only."

Here then lies one great root cause of all divisions. We have not walked, nor held the truth, in the power and grace of the Holy Spirit; nor submitted to His guidance and control, with the result that there has been the increasing intrusion of the flesh, and its methods, leading to endless strife, confusion and division.

There is, however, as we have said, another great cause of divisions; we have not held the Head. One has said "while we have theorised about Christ as Head (and consequently as our Resource, instead of the machinery of the denominations) we have never known how to use Him when difficulty has come in. Where we should have referred the matter to Him, and waited for His solution, there has been the impatience and zeal of the flesh that would put forth its hand for the steadying of the Ark with the resultant smiting from the hand of the Lord." We have held the truth of the Head, we would have died for the truth, and yet all the time it may be, we have not held the Head. To hold the truth of the Head is merely to hold the doctrine, and so far right; but to hold the Head is to turn to the One who is the Head and use the resources that are in Him as the Head. We have made the mistake of looking for power and wisdom and guidance in the Church and our conceptions of it; and thus in our difficulties and perplexities we have looked to teachers, leaders, and gifted men in the Church, rather than to the One who is the Head of the Church and in whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead. We have not turned to Him and spread out before Him all our difficulties and differences of judgment. With a measure of knowledge of divine principles we have assumed competency to apply these principles in the difficulties that have arisen, forgetting that however correct our principles they can only be rightly applied under the direction, and by the wisdom and perfect knowledge of the Head. We have discussed difficulties amongst ourselves, and trusted in men rather than in Christ the Head; with the result that we have been left very

largely to our own devices. As we read of the godly Hezekiah, there came a moment in his history when "God left him, to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart" (2 Chronicles 32:31). We have failed to hold the Head and we have been "left" to do what is right in our own eyes, and the outcome has been sorrow upon sorrow and division upon division.

Moreover, have we not failed in the maintenance of that holy separation which in the beginning was such a prominent mark of this spiritual movement, and without which all else is in vain? In the history of the remnant who returned from the captivity to build the house of the Lord, the first attack of the enemy was an effort to break down their holy separation by the attempt to form an unequal alliance to do the work of the Lord (Ezra 4:2). And so also in regard to those who, in obedience to the Word, have gone forth from the great religious systems which have been formed by sincere men after the pattern of the Camp (Hebrews 13:13), has there not been a constant effort by the enemy to entangle them again in these systems, and thus lead them to surrender or nullify the great truths concerning Christ and the Church which can only be held and enjoyed by a separated people? As we have seen with the remnant in the days of Ezra, the plea of service to the Lord's people and furthering the Lord's work, has been constantly advanced in order to justify a return to, or service in connection with, these corrupt religious systems in which so many of God's dear people are held in bondage. Those caught by this snare forget that the measure of our preparation for the Master's use is the measure of our separation from all that is contrary to the Lord outwardly and inwardly (2 Timothy 2:19-22). We do well to remember that if we have separated from these systems in spite of true people of God being in them, it cannot be right to return to these systems because they are there. Furthermore, we must not forget that the Lord knows full well how to care for His beloved sheep wherever they may be found, and that He will not let them suffer because we, in obedience to His word and faithfulness to Himself, refuse to go back to the systems in which they may be found.

These then are, we believe, the great root causes of division — we have not maintained separation — we have not walked in the Spirit — we have not held the Head. Moreover, a little thought will show that the root causes of the divisions that have marred this last great movement of the Spirit of God, are the same causes that brought all the ruin into the early Church. The practical setting aside of the Holy Spirit by fleshly expedients, the absolute ignoring of the Church's Head in heaven by setting up a visible head on earth, and the formation of unholy alliances with the world, are the outstanding sins of Christendom, which have involved the ruin of the Church on earth and are leading to the final apostacy. As we have seen, the Spirit of God, in the last century, led a great number of the people of God to separate from the systems of men to walk in the light of the truth as taught in the epistles, and maintained in the Church at the beginning; but, alas, very soon there came breakdown in practice by falling into the failures of the Church in its early days, when it departed from first love and allowed the world a place inside. The result is, as with Israel of old, the enemy is at the gate and there are breaches in the wall.

EFFORTS TO HEAL THE BREACHES.

Like Israel of old many have fallen into the snare (that looks so commendable and plausible) of endeavouring to heal the breaches by human efforts and human expedients. These efforts have taken two forms.

First, an effort has been made to heal the breaches by leaders in different sections of brethren conferring together in the hope of removing difficulties and coming to some understanding.

Second, an effort has been made, and is still being made, on the part of more or less gifted individuals to bring about healing by ministering in meetings where they would not or could not break bread.

Both are the worldly methods adopted by the religious world with the hope of removing the scandal of the great religious sects, and of arriving at some form of religious unity. The one by ecclesiastical conferences and the other by exchange of pulpits. Seeing the true character of these methods, as being merely human expedients savouring of the world and its principles, there can be little wonder that both have signally failed. The reason of this failure is fairly obvious. As to the first method — the attempt to stop the breaches by way of conference — it must be clear that if any healing could be accomplished on the ground of a few leading brothers having settled their differences it could hardly be anything but an amalgamation of parties which would set aside the great principles of the Church of God, and leave the consciences of the mass totally unexercised. Moreover, such conferences have been almost wholly occupied with discussing details of doctrines and practices in the past which were believed to be the primary cause of these divisions. The inevitable result has been that each sought to justify his own position. In a word, these conferences were concerned with second causes rather than with the great first causes of division to which we have already referred. Occupied with second causes it is easy to find much that is right, and much that is wrong, on all sides. Occupied with first causes we should have found in our common failure a common ground of confession before the Lord. As to the second method — certain brothers essaying to minister where they cannot break bread — it may well be advanced that to associate in preaching and ministry with those with whom I cannot identify myself in the breaking of bread in their community is to place the need of man, and the care of saints, on a higher plane than the glory of Christ. If some solemn matter has arisen which prevents my having fellowship with saints in the highest and holiest of Christian privileges, how can I consistently have fellowship with them in service? To ignore the higher claim while endeavouring to carry out the lower is surely putting a slight upon Christ. Moreover, those who act upon this principle are generally, sooner or later, drawn back into the great systems of men from which they formerly separated, under the plea of helping the Lord’s people in these systems. They ask, "What harm is there in joining in the work of the Lord with those with whom we cannot break bread?" But it is not long before such reverse their question and, with every show of reason, ask, "Why not break bread with those with whom we work?" The result being that such slip back into the worldly religious systems from which they had nominally separated. They may plead it is a matter of service, and to their own Master they stand and fall. This may be said in all sincerity, but too often we fear, perhaps unconsciously, the Lord’s holy name is being used to cover the solemn fact that they are doing what is right in their own eyes. Alas! how many names can be recalled of those who, under the plea of wider service and greater usefulness, have abandoned the path of separation and have been lured back into the great systems of corrupt Christendom, or into a wider and more conscienceless association with representatives of every system, while claiming that they do not belong to any. Such are now building again the things that once they destroyed. They little thought to go the lengths that they have gone, but, starting on an inclined plane they found circumstances too powerful for them. This is because such have confused "testimony" with

"fellowship." It is indeed our privilege to testify the truth to saints and sinners, but if we are to remain faithful to the truth and to the Lord, it must be apart from all fellowship with the systems in which many of the saints may be found; otherwise we shall drop into a form of "independency" and self-will which on the part of some even gifted men, has caused so much distress and confusion among the Lord's people.

Thus we fear that both these efforts to stop the breaches have not only signally failed, but worse, they have tended to further scatter the Lord's people, have accentuated their differences, and enlarged the very breaches that they desired to stop. Like Israel of old, they have broken down houses to build up breaches. If then all these efforts have failed, it may well be asked WHAT ARE WE TO DO IN THE PRESENCE OF DIVISIONS? In the first place we must ever remember that if "brethren" so-called had never divided, or if, by some miracle of grace, they were all together again, they would still be but a little remnant, The Church would still be broken and ruined. The mere coming together again of brethren would very well content many, but would it content the Lord? Viewing things from our standpoint our vision becomes contracted, our interests limited, and our affections cramped. Did we but see things from the Lord's standpoint we should feel more deeply the condition of the whole Church, and our part with it in all the evil and confusion that has come into the house of God through our failure in responsibility.

However, just as the remnant in Haggai's day, though forming part of all Israel, were distinguished from their brethren in captivity, and had special messages from the Lord, and were dealt with in a special way by the Lord, so may we not say that those in our day, who have received the light of the Church, and seek to walk according to this light, are in a place of special privilege with special responsibilities, though united with all Christians to form the house of God, and sharing in the ruin of that house? With this reminder, let us confine our thoughts, for the moment, to the divisions among those called "Brethren." Again we ask, does Scripture give us any light as to what is the right course to pursue in the presence of these divisions? Doubtless many Scriptures contain principles that will guide us, and amongst others may we not say that the passage we have quoted from the prophet Isaiah, has great instruction for us in the presence of our failure, as indeed it had for Israel in the day of their failure?

We have seen that the prophet reproaches Israel in the day of their perplexity with not discerning the hand of the Lord in all their troubles. If the enemy was at the gate, if there were breaches in the walls, they failed to see that it was "by" or "from the Lord." First then, learning by their failure, let us unreservedly own that because of our folly the hand of the Lord is upon us in discipline. In the address to Laodicea, presenting the last phase of the professing Church on earth under the gaze of the Lord, He sees on the one hand the great mass of unreal profession which He is about to spue out of His mouth: on the other hand He sees His own — those whom He loves — and such He chastens. Has not the day come when we either belong to those who are loathed and spued out of His mouth, or to those who are loved and chastened by His hand? Looking beyond all second causes which may instrumentally have brought about division, let us see clearly, and definitely admit, that because of our failure these breaches are "from the Lord." It is not that, by so speaking, we charge the Lord with our sin and failure but behind all these troubles and because of our sin and failure, we see the hand of the Lord. No one would charge the Lord with the sin of stirring up strife among the Lord's people, and yet because of the low condition of the Ezra remnant the Lord says, "I set all men everyone against his neighbour" (Zechariah 8:9-10).

Moreover, if we are broken and divided under the chastening of the Lord it behoves us to beware lest we "despise" the chastening of the Lord on the one hand, or "faint" under it on the other. To say, as some do, "Divisions are all wrong and therefore we ignore them, and minister, or even break bread, wherever we can" is to ignore the fact that divisions exist under the chastening of the Lord, in a word, to despise His chastening — an intensely solemn thing. On the other hand to surrender divine principles and abandon the path of separation because of our failure, is to "faint" under the chastening of the Lord. We have been too apt to view division in relation to our brethren and the way they have treated us, or we have treated them, rather than view them in relation to the Lord and the way we have treated Him. We have said, "We are divided because so-and-so did a wrong act or propounded a wrong doctrine," instead of saying, "We are divided because we have failed to give Christ His place as Head in whom is all the fulness of the Godhead, all power and all wisdom for every possible difficulty that could arise in the history of the Church." The Lord has allowed us to discover that it is much easier to divide than to come together again.

Secondly, we have seen that in the day of Israel’s trouble and perplexity they made efforts to stop the breaches, and they looked to their armour, but they did not look unto the Lord. Here surely we have another great lesson — not only let us own that all that has come upon us is "from the Lord," but, abandoning our own puny efforts to stop the breaches, let us whole-heartedly turn to the Lord. The point of departure must of necessity be the point of recovery. As we have seen, "Not holding the Head" was the point of departure, to turn to the Head, as our all-sufficient resource is the way of recovery. It should deeply touch us that the very One we have so deeply wronged — whom we have slighted and grieved — is the only One to whom we can turn in our sin and shame. It is far easier to set to work to repair the breaches than to bow before the Lord in confession of the sin that caused the breaches. One has said "It suits the flesh in us far more to repair a breach and so present a respectable appearance, than to bow in confession and own the hand of the Lord dealing in faithfulness with that which He loves" (Revelation 3:19).

Finally the inhabitants of Jerusalem were rebuked for feasting and drinking at the very time when the Lord called for weeping and mourning. If it is right to stedfastly set our faces against all human efforts to patch up the breaches, does it therefore mean that we must quietly acquiesce in the fact that the Lord’s people are divided? Are we to settle down in heartless indifference to the saints from whom we are divided? Far be such a thought. But it may be asked "What else is there to do?" There is one thing we can do — and only one — we can humble ourselves before the Lord and cry mightily to the One who has said "I will close up the breaches" (Amos 9:11). In the presence of the breaches we may well look to God that our hearts may be burdened with the sense of our sin and shame, so that with hearts moved to their depths we may confess our sin to the Lord and cry mightily to Him, and wait, and wait upon Him, for who can tell whether He will be gracious to us, and how far He might grant some measure of healing; and who can say that even yet there may not be some distinct movement of the Spirit of God in [the early part of] this century as in the preceding centuries? Whether it will be so, or what form it might take none can forecast. God is sovereign and will maintain His sovereignty in spite of all that we are. It is ours to cast ourselves upon Him confessing our failure and the common failure of the Church. Such confession, commencing perhaps with only a few, might spread to a very great number being brought to confession before the Lord. The first movement of the Spirit in dealing with unholy alliances formed by the people who returned from the captivity, commenced with one man. Ezra alone

pours out his soul before God, saying, "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to Thee" (Ezra 9:6). But the effect of one man’s acting by the Spirit was very great, for we read "When Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children, for the people wept very sore."

Thus in the presence of these sad divisions our only godly course is to unreservedly own that the Lord’s hand is upon us in discipline, to turn to the Lord as our only and sufficient resource, and humble ourselves under His mighty hand in confession of our sin and shame.

If, by a special work of the Spirit of God in our day "a very great congregation" of the people of God, in all parts of the earth were stirred to humble themselves in confession before God, it might be answered by that long looked for moment when the Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout, when the sleeping saints shall be raised, when the living saints will be changed, and when at last His scattered and long divided saints "shall be caught up together" to be for ever with the Lord.

H. S.

NOTE. From the foregoing remarks it might be concluded that the possibility of local healing between divided saints is ignored. Where there is a growing acquaintance with the truths of the Assembly on the part of two local companies, their common exercises may draw them together in the confession of their departure from these truths. If such humble themselves under the chastening hand of the Lord, it may result in the Lord bringing them together to walk once again in the light of the Assembly. Such cases, though rare, are not unknown. On the other hand it must not be forgotten, that two divided companies may find themselves together through gradual decline from the truth of the Assembly. By the loss of these truths and the consequent lack of godly exercise, they may find themselves together on common ground, but, alas, on lower ground than that of the Assembly, thus only adding to the confusion amongst the Lord’s people. Such cases are only too common.

S. The Bride of the Lamb.

The Bride of the Lamb.

Hamilton Smith.

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INTRODUCTION

Every instructed believer is aware that the Church — or Assembly of God — is composed of all believers united to Christ in the glory by the Holy Spirit on earth. Further, that the Church came into being at the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and will be completed at the coming of the Lord, at the rapture.

We know too that the Church is viewed in different aspects, and presented under various figures, in the New Testament. It is viewed as the one flock (John 10:16); as the House of God (1 Timothy 3:15); as the one Body (1 Corinthians 12:12-13); and lastly as the Bride of the Lamb (2 Corinthians 11:2; Revelation 21:9). In each case it is the same company of people but viewed in different ways to present different truths. As the one flock the Assembly is viewed as composed of all believers held together by the attractive power of Christ as the one Shepherd, who leads His people through this wilderness world, saving them from the enemy, protecting them from every danger, and leading them into green pastures. As the House of God the Assembly is viewed as the dwelling place on earth of God the Holy Spirit, where the truth is maintained, and a witness borne to the world of the grace of God. As the one Body, of which Christ is the Head, the Assembly is viewed as a company of people nourished by the Head, and in whom all the fulness of Christ is set forth. As the Bride of the Lamb, the Church is viewed as wholly for Christ the object of His love, and care, and delight. It is this aspect of the Church that we desire briefly to consider. It is an aspect of the Church that, in a special way, brings into display the love of Christ, and for this reason appeals very directly to our hearts.

There is no more intimate relationship than that of a bridegroom and a bride. Hence the perfect suitability of these figures to set forth the love of Christ for His Church. Briefly we may say that the Spirit of God has used this most intimate of all relationships to set forth, First, the Church as the object of Christ’s love, care, and delight.

Second, that in the Church there will be an object suited for Christ to love.

Third, that in the Church there will be found a companion suited to share with Christ the coming glories of His reign. All that the Bridegroom inherits the Bride will inherit. The sharer of His sufferings in the day of His rejection, she will be the sharer of His throne in the day of His glory. When Christ reigns over the wide earth she will reign with Him.

CHAPTER 1 CHRIST AND HIS BRIDE Ephesians 5:22-32 In this very practical portion of the Epistle to the Ephesians the Apostle is exhorting us as to the conduct that becomes believers in the marriage relationship. In so doing he shows the intimate character of the relationship. There are other relations in life, as parents and children, and brothers and sisters, but in no relationship is the link so close as in that of husband and wife. The Apostle says, "they two shall be one flesh:" again he says, "so ought men to love their wives as their own bodies." They are viewed as one; hence the Apostle argues, for a man to hate his wife would be to hate his own flesh, an unheard-of thing. On the other hand to love his wife is to love himself. To enforce these exhortations and show the true character of this time-relationship of husband and wife, the Apostle turns to the eternal relationship of Christ and His Church. This leads to a very beautiful unfolding of the love of Christ for His Church viewed under the figure of a Bride, of which Eve, in the garden of Eden, is used as a striking type. The Apostle passes before us the love of Christ that secures the Bride for Himself; then, possessing the Bride, the love that forms her in suitability to Himself; and finally, having prepared the Bride, the love that will present her to Himself.

First we read, "Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it" (v. 25). The source of all blessing for the Church is the motiveless love of Christ. Before ever the Church was brought into being He loved it with a perfect, divine, and infinite love. He did not first die for it, and cleanse it, and then love it; but He first loved it and died for it, and then cleanses it. And loving the Church He gave Himself for it. He did not only do something for it; He did not simply give up something for it. His love went a great way further than doing something, or giving up something, for the Church. His love went to the uttermost: He gave Himself. All that He is in His infinite perfections; nothing was held back. He gave Himself; more He could not give. And by giving Himself for the Assembly He secures it for Himself, and possesses it by a perfect title. The Church actually exists as the result of Christ’s work. Christ has purchased the Church for Himself. Hence, though the marriage has not yet taken place, the relationship between Christ and the Church already exists. The Church is not a company of people who are being put to the test by commands which they have to obey in order to gain the relationship. Christ has brought us into relationship with Himself wholly by His own work, the fruit of His own love. The responsibilities and privileges of the Church flow from the relationship that has already been formed. We belong to Christ, and it is our privilege, as well as our obligation, to be entirely His, and entirely for Him. Christ, we need not say, has ever been faithful in His changeless love, though, alas, how much the Bride has failed in devotedness to the Bridegroom!

Secondly, having so touchingly presented the love of Christ in giving Himself for the Church in the past, the Apostle proceeds to speak of the activities of the love of Christ for His Bride in the present. He tells us that Christ has secured his Bride in order "that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word." The love that by death secured the Bride is now occupied in preparing her for the supreme happiness of being with Himself in glory. The Bridegroom would make her a suited object for His love, and capable of responding to His love. To this end love is occupied in sanctifying and cleansing the Bride. The cleansing is not in order that we may belong to Him, but because we are His; and being His He would have us suited to Himself. He would have us in devoted affection set apart entirely for Himself, and cleansed from all that is contrary to Himself. The means used to bring this about is "the washing of water by the word." The Lord expresses this in His prayer to the Father when He prays "Sanctify them through the truth, Thy

word is truth . . . for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth." The Lord sets Himself apart in heaven, that, like Stephen, we might look up through the opened heavens and find in Christ in glory a sanctifying Object. Gazing upon Him in the glory we see what He would have us to be, and beholding the glory of the Lord we are changed into the same image from glory to glory, and thus realize the transforming power of a perfect Object. The "word " too, while directing our gaze to Christ, gives us a true revelation of the perfections of the One we gaze upon, so that we are not left to any sentimental imaginations of our own hearts. On the other hand the word detects and condemns in us, and around us, all that is contrary to Christ and the place where He is.

What a value this gives to the "word"! For it is the "word" which He uses for the cleansing of His Church. What confidence should this give in applying the word to our own souls, or in ministering the word to one another — the confidence that we are using that which in grace He uses. In the light of this Scripture which discovers to us what Christ is occupied with from His place in heaven, we may well challenge our hearts as to what we are occupied with down here. Occurring in the practical part of the Epistle, this unfolding of the love of Christ for His Bride is surely intended to have a very practical effect upon our lives. The question for us all is, Have we before our hearts what Christ has before His? Do we desire to be made suitable to Him, and capable of enjoying, and responding to, His love even now, so that, in the time of His absence, we may be faithful to Christ as a waiting Bride for her absent Bridegroom.

Thirdly, the present activities of the love of Christ for His Bride are in view of what is yet future — "the marriage of the Lamb" — when He will present the Church to Himself a glorious Church, "not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." It is not only that the Church will be in glory, but it will be "glorious." It will be like Christ, fit for His glorious presence. Thus He secured His Bride by Himself; He is preparing her for Himself; and will present her to Himself. His love is the source of all, and what love commenced at the cross, love will complete in the glory.

There is, however, further important truth concerning Christ and the Church in this instructive passage. The Apostle proceeds to tell us that Christ nourishes and cherishes the Assembly, treating us as "members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones." This brings before us another precious truth, distinct from that which we have been considering. We have seen that Christ is fitting His Bride for heaven; now we learn that He is also caring for His Bride on earth. Sanctifying and cleansing are in view of the presentation in glory; nourishing and cherishing have reference to our pilgrim journey on earth. His love not only looks on to the glory, but watches over us as we pass through this dark world from which He is absent, on our way to glory. He knows the circumstances we are in, the trials we have to meet, our weaknesses and infirmities, and in them all He cares for us and meets our needs; and thus it is He nourishes us. But He also cherishes us; that is He not only meets our needs, but He does so as those who are cherished as being very precious in His sight. In order to give us a sense of how precious we are in His sight — of the value He sets upon His Assembly — He speaks of us as members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. That is to say, He views us as Himself, for a man’s flesh is himself. So that in caring for His Assembly He is caring for Himself. Thus He can say to Saul, "Why persecutest thou Me?" Saul was indeed persecuting the Church, but in so doing he was persecuting Christ.

How precious, as another has said, that "the wants, the weaknesses, the difficulties, the anxieties of the Assembly are only opportunities to Christ for the exercise of His love. The Assembly needs to be nourished, as do our bodies; and He nourishes her. She is the object of his tender affections; He cherishes her. If the end is heaven the Assembly is not left desolate here. She learns His love where her heart needs it. She will enjoy it fully when need has passed away for ever."

CHAPTER 2 THE BRIDE IN THE COUNSELS OF GOD

Genesis 2:1-25 The passage that we have been considering in Ephesians 5:1-33, closes with a quotation from the end if Genesis 2:1-25, where we read, after Eve has been formed and presented to Adam, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." Having quoted this passage the Apostle, in Ephesians 5:1-33, immediately adds "This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church." This surely warrants us in saying that in Adam and Eve we have a beautiful type of Christ and His Church. In the garden of Eden with all its divinely ordered arrangements we not only learn what is in the heart of God for man, but what is in the heart of God for Christ. Adam was not the man of God’s purpose; he was only a figure of Him that was to come. We might well ask why was this earth with all its created wonders brought into existence? Now that the mystery of Christ and His Church has been revealed we have God’s answer; and in picture His answer is given directly creation is completed, and before ever sin came in. God’s answer is Christ and the satisfaction of His heart. It is true that the Church was counselled before the foundation of the world, for the thought of the Church carries us back to the eternal purpose of God and takes us on to eternity. It belongs to eternity, though time and creation are used to bring the Church into existence. The Church was no after-thought with God. Creation was first in point of time, but the Church was first in the counsels of God, as we may surely gather from Ephesians 3:1-21, where we read, that God "created all things by Jesus Christ to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." The Church having been formed, "the heavens and earth which are now" will, in due time, pass away and the Church will remain for the glory of God and the satisfaction of the love of Christ to the ages of ages.

While however we see Christ and the Church presented in a picture we must remember that Eve presents the Church as the Bride of Christ. As we have seen there are other aspects of the Church, but this we judge, to be the highest conception of the Church, that which is nearest to the heart of God and dearest to the heart of Christ, for therein we learn that God has purposed to secure an object that is entirely suited for the love of Christ. In the Church as the Bride we see, not only a company of people who find in Christ a satisfying Object for their hearts, but, a company of people who become a suited object for the love of Christ. This is the wonder and blessedness of the Church viewed as the Bride of Christ. It is little wonder that the Church should find in Christ an Object of love, but that in the Church an object should be found entirely suited for Christ to love is indeed a great wonder. With this great thought God opens His book and with this great thought it closes. What God begins with He never gives up. Genesis opens with a picture that discloses this thought of His heart: and though sin and death mar the creation of God, and, in the long sad history of the failure of man and the ruin of the Church in responsibility, the picture is blurred and even lost to view, yet at last this great thought of God emerges into the light, and in the close of the Book we are permitted once again to see Jesus delighting in His Bride, and the Bride waiting for

Jesus.

Looking briefly at the picture in Genesis 2:1-25, we have in the early part of the chapter a description of the Garden of delights that God provided for man. Eden means "pleasure." It is God’s delight to provide for the pleasure of His creature. Thus we find in the garden there is "every tree that is pleasant to the sight," to provide all things beautiful; there is every tree "good for food," to meet all the wants of man; there is the tree of life to give the capacity to enjoy the scene; and there is the tree of knowledge of good and evil with its prohibition, so that all this garden of delights might be enjoyed in relationship with God expressed by obedience to God. This scene of beauty having been formed, man is placed in the garden to dress it and keep it. Nevertheless, beautiful as the scene is, it falls short of perfection; and for this reason, man is alone. His surroundings were perfect, his position was supreme, he was far above the lower creation — but he was alone, and it is not good that man should be alone. There was everything there for the delight of his eye; there was everything there to sustain life; there was the capacity to enjoy his surroundings: but in all that scene of beauty and plenty, there was not an object that could satisfy his heart, for there was nothing there, from the greatest to the least, that could respond to the love of his heart. The man was alone. But another scene rises up before our souls. A scene of which this is but a beautiful foreshadowing: a scene into which sin can never enter. Perfect as the garden was in itself, it was liable to the intrusion of an enemy, and we know indeed how soon he entered and brought sin and death and ruin into this garden of delights. But the home it foreshadows is not only a place of infinite perfection and eternal delight, but there "deceiver ne’er can enter, sin-soiled feet have never trod" — a scene where there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, nor any more pain. These things are not there, and can never enter there, for they are passed away. But Jesus is there, the Son of Man will be supreme in that realm of glory, and may we not say He will be there to dress it and keep it; for all the adorning of that scene as well as its eternal security will be the result of His own work, No soil of nature’s evil, No touch of man’s rude hand Shall e’er disturb around us That bright and blissful land. The charms that woo the senses Shall be as bright as fair, For all, while breathing round us Shall tell of Jesus there. But even so, if He were there alone would His heart be satisfied? Would we be satisfied to find ourselves in a scene of infinite perfection and infinite holiness, if Jesus were not there? And will He be satisfied if we are not there? A scene of infinite perfection would not satisfy the heart: we must have an object for the heart, and must not He have an object for His heart? But how is this object to be secured? This we learn in picture as we see the way that God provided an helpmeet for Adam.

First we learn that the one who is to be his helpmeet must be his "counterpart" or "his like," for thus should we read the last two words of verse 18. The one that can satisfy the heart of Adam must be "his like," and thus have the same thoughts and affections, and be able to respond to his love. For love can only be satisfied with an object that responds to love. The lower creation is passed before Adam. He gives them each a name — not a fanciful name, for in Scripture a name signifies the distinguishing characteristic of that which is named. Hence in naming the animals we see that Adam had perfect knowledge of the animals. But with this full knowledge he fails to find one "his like." In all that lower creation there was not one that could share his thoughts, feel as he felt, and respond to his love. He was on an immeasurably higher plane than the animal creation.

Hence to provide one "his like," there must be a fresh intervention of God, and in this fresh work three things are clearly seen.

First, Eve was taken from Adam, Second, Eve was formed for Adam, Third, Eve was presented to Adam.

Here then we have in picture the three great truths that have been before us in Ephesians 5:1-33. First if Eve was to be his like she must be taken out of Adam. Hence the deep sleep and the rib taken from Adam, from which the woman was built. So too, if Christ is to have His Bride — one that is His like — that can respond to His love — she must indeed be of Himself. He must go into the deep sleep of death or remain for ever alone; "except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone." "When Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed." His "seed," which must he His like, is the outcome of His death, and love was behind His death, for we read, "Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it."

Further we read, that having taken the rib from man "the Lord God built the rib that he had taken from man into a woman" (N. Tr.). And in connection with the Church, is not this the work that is being carried on at the present time by the Spirit? If through the death of Christ the Bride — one His like — has been secured, at the present time through the work of the Spirit our affections are being engaged with Christ, with the result that Christ sanctifies and cleanses us with the washing of water by the word. Our hearts become powerfully affected by the love of Christ; bridal affections are formed with the result that we are set apart in affection to Himself and cleansed from all that is unsuited to a true and chaste bride.

Lastly there is the presentation of the Bride. Eve is brought to the man. And Adam said "This time [in contrast to the time when the animals passed before him] it is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh: this shall be called woman because this was taken out of a man." At last Adam finds one "his like." So, too, the day is coming when the Church will be presented to Christ "a glorious Church not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish." It will be of Himself and therefore His like. It will be formed in His affections by the sanctifying and cleansing effect of the word and therefore able to respond to His love. For all eternity Christ is going to have His Bride, like Himself, one that can think as He thinks, feel as He feels, love as He loves, and hence one that is made perfectly suited to be the object of His love. Then indeed Christ will be satisfied. He will see of the fruit of the travail of His soul and be satisfied.

O day of wondrous promise! The Bridegroom and the Bride Are seen in glory ever; And love is satisfied.

CHAPTER 3 THE CALL OF THE BRIDE

Genesis 24:1-67

Genesis 24:1-67 is of the deepest interest to the Christian, for therein we have a divinely given picture of what is engaging every Person in the Godhead at the present moment.

Occupation with service, constant vigilance against the enemy, and conflict for the truth — entailed by the need of the world, the increasing corruption of Christendom, and the failure of God’s people — may so thoroughly engross our thoughts that at times we may overlook what God is doing in spite of all the power of the enemy, the corruption, and the failure. Hence it is no small mercy that God has given us this beautiful picture which present a comprehensive view of the aims and

activities of Divine Persons. Thus, losing sight of man and his failure, our souls may delight in God and His purpose, and be calmed and quieted as we realize that what God has purposed He will most surely bring to pass, in spite of failure and opposition. To enter intelligently into the typical teaching of the chapter we must seize the connection of the passage with the chapters that precede and follow. Genesis 24:1-67 forms part of the last section of Abraham's history, beginning with Genesis 22:1-24 and ending with Genesis 25:10. The early part of his history illustrates the individual life of faith, but in this last section we have a comprehensive view of the dispensational ways of God. In Genesis 22:1-24 Isaac is offered up, and received from the dead in figure — a striking type of the death and resurrection of Christ. Following upon the offering up of Isaac, we have in Genesis 23:1-20 the death of Sarah, and Abraham, "a stranger and sojourner" (v. 4) in the promised land: all being typical of the setting aside, for the time being, of Israel as a nation on the ground of promise, consequent upon the death of Christ. In the call of Rebekah, Genesis 24:1-67, we have typically the call of the Church as the Bride of Christ during the time that Israel is set aside. Genesis 25:1-34 completes the picture by presenting the marriage of Abraham, and the sons of this second wife, typical of the restoration of Israel and the millennial blessing of the nations.

Confining our thoughts to Genesis 24:1-67 we have the unfolding in a picture of the great mystery of Christ and the Church. We see therein the purpose of God and the way He takes to fulfil that purpose.

Let us however keep in mind that it is God's purpose in connection with the Church viewed as the Bride of Christ. As we have seen, this aspect of the Church presents God's purpose to have an object entirely suited for Christ to love. Here then in picture we have the call of the Bride, the adornment of the Bride, and the presentation of the Bride to the Bridegroom in suitability to Himself. Moral suitability to the heart of Christ, and response to the love of Christ, are the outstanding thoughts in connection with the Church as the Bride.

We have seen that Eve, at the creation, speaks of the Bride of Christ. Isaac and Rebekah, eighteen centuries later, again take up the story of Christ and His Bride. There is however a difference, for in Scripture there is no mere repetition; in Eve we see the bride as wholly the result of a divine work which formed her and brought her to Adam: in Rebekah we see the exercise of affection in the bride — the outgoings of love that are called into activity by the servant. If Eve tells us of a divine work for the bride, Rebekah speaks of a divine work in the bride. The chapter opens with Abraham giving his directions to his servant (vv. 1-9). Then the main portion of the chapter is occupied with the servant and his mission (vv. 10-61). Finally it closes with Isaac and his love for Rebekah (vv. 62-67). Thus in type we have in the first section the Father and His purpose; in the second the Holy Spirit and His work; and in the last, Christ and His affection. Hence in picture we have every Divine Person engaged in securing the Bride.

1

First we learn that the thought of a bride for Isaac originates with Abraham. He it is that commences the story of Genesis 24:1-67. He discloses his mind as to the bride for Isaac; he instructs his servant, and sends him on his way. Thus we learn that the thought of a Bride for Christ originates in the purpose of the Father's heart. It is, too, the Father who sends the Spirit to bring the Bride to Christ (John 14:26). The second verse brings before us the one whose activities

form the prominent part in the story — "the eldest servant" of Abraham's house. Very fittingly his name is not mentioned, for is he not a type of the Holy Spirit who has come, not to speak of Himself, but, to take of the things of Christ and show them unto us? The activities of the Holy Spirit in this world are many and varied, but in this chapter the Holy Spirit is presented in picture as bringing the Bride to light, awakening affection in the Bride by unfolding the glories of Christ, and then satisfying those affections by leading her to Christ.

Very significant are the directions that the servant receives from Abraham and rich with instructions for our souls.

1. The bride for Isaac must be suited for Isaac and hence must not be taken from the daughters of the Canaanites (v. 3). Such were devoted to judgment and therefore wholly unsuited to Isaac. This would show that the dealings with Rebekah are not exactly a picture of the grace of God bringing salvation to sinners, but rather of the love of Christ appealing to saints. Were it a question of setting forth the grace of God that reaches the vilest sinners then surely the daughters of the Canaanites would have been the very people to whom the servant would have been sent as in the gospel story, in which God takes up a Syrophenician woman — a daughter of Canaan — to show forth His grace.

2. It follows that if the bride is to be suited to Isaac she must be of Isaac's kindred. So the direction to the servant is, "Thou shalt go unto my country and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac" (v. 4). We have already noticed that the one who was suited to be the bride of Adam had to be "his like," and to obtain one "his like" Adam had to pass through the "deep sleep." Isaac, too, must in type go through death — must be offered up on Mount Moriah — before he could secure a bride from Mesopotamia. So Christ, the great Anti-type, the precious corn of wheat, must fall into the ground and die or for ever remain alone. When His soul is made an offering for sin then we read, "He shall see his seed." Death which cuts a man off from all hope of a seed, becomes the very way by which Christ secures His seed. And His seed is His like, His kindred, as is the heavenly One so also are the heavenly ones. Thus we see the Bride of Christ is composed of those who are suited in origin through a divine work for them, and stand in relation to Christ as His kindred through a divine work in them, producing faith in Christ. On earth the Lord could say, "My mother, and my brethren are those which hear the word of God and do it" (Luke 8:21).

3. Abraham solemnly warns the servant twice over that he is not to bring Isaac again to Mesopotamia (vv. 6 and 8). Isaac in this chapter sets forth a heavenly Christ and hence after the offering up of Isaac in Genesis 22:1-24, his name is not even mentioned until the end of Genesis 24:1-67. As Isaac was not again to be linked with Mesopotamia, so there is to be no link with Christ and the world while Christ is on high and the Holy Spirit is here calling out the Bride for the heavenly Christ. Alas! so thoroughly has Christendom lost all true thought of Christianity that its one great effort is to link Christ with the world that has cast Him out. Ignoring the fact that Christ is the Stone rejected by the builders of this world, they seek to make Christ the chief corner stone, as it were, of their great earthly religious systems. His Name is attached to their great religious buildings, their schemes of reformation, their works of philanthropy, and their forms of government. In a word the great effort is to bring Christ back to the world and attach His Name to unsaved and unconverted men of the world with the hope of reforming men, and making the world in which they live a brighter and better place. It is hardly possible to conceive anything more characteristic of the

ingenuity of the devil than for the world to attempt to cover its wickedness with a veneer of respectability, by attaching to itself the Name of the One that it has rejected and nailed to the Cross.

However the instructed believer knows by New Testament teaching, as well as Old Testament type, that the Holy Spirit is here, not to bring Christ back to the world, but to take the Bride out of the world to Christ. So we read, "God . . . did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name" (Acts 15:14).

4. Finally Abraham says, "The Lord God of heaven . . . shall send his angel before thee" (v. 7). The angel would providentially clear the way before the servant, but the servant was personally to deal with the bride, "Thou shalt take a wife unto my son." Both the servant and the angel were wholly occupied in securing a bride for Isaac. In a day to come we know what a large part the angels will take in executing judgment in the world, but to-day they are "sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation." As in the picture, so in fact, we see the difference maintained between the providential work of angels and the personal work of the Spirit. The angel of the Lord guides Philip on his way to the desert of Gaza, but the Spirit guides Philip in his personal dealing with the Eunuch (Acts 8:26, Acts 8:29).

Clearly then in the directions given by Abraham to his servant, we learn the great mission of the Holy Spirit in this world. He is not here to prosper the Christian in business, or to make us wealthy men in this world, or to make the world a comfortable place for us. He is not here to remove the curse, or hush creation’s groan. He is not here to make the desert rejoice and blossom as the rose. He is not here to remove pain, and death, and sorrow, and tears. All this Christ will do in a day yet to come. Nor is He here to convert the world as some think. He is here to bring to light a people who are suited to Christ for the joy and satisfaction of His heart.

Thus in accordance with these instructions we find that in the course of the story the servant does not interfere with the conditions that prevailed in Mesopotamia. He did not attempt to alter its religion, or improve its social conditions, or interfere with its government. His one business was to secure the bride for Isaac. How much disappointment the people of God would escape if once they realized God’s great purpose at the present time, and the special mission of the Holy Spirit in this world.

Believers are oft-times disappointed with themselves. Desiring to do some great work for the Lord, they find they are left to do some quiet work in a hidden corner, and are disappointed. Again they may get sadly disappointed with the local company of saints with whom they walk. They had hoped that God would convert great numbers and bring their little company into prominence as a centre of blessing with the Lord’s public approval and instead they find weakness and failure, and are disappointed. Again we may be disappointed with the people of God generally. We perhaps had visions of getting the scattered fragments of God’s people together to walk in unity and love, and behold we find only discord and further disintegration and we grow disappointed.

Again the people of God may entertain great hopes from the mission field. With thousands of missionaries working in all parts of the world they had hoped that the strongholds of heathendom, Buddhism and Mohammedanism would be broken down before the light of Christianity, and yet they find these false systems are hardly touched, and they are disappointed.

Others again have entertained the thought that after nineteen centuries of the light of Christianity the world would be morally better, and instead they have to admit that never was society more corrupt, lawlessness so prevalent, and unrest so general, hence they are disappointed.

If, however, we abandon our own thoughts and rise up to God's thoughts we shall not be disappointed. Our expectations are oftentimes too limited, our outlook too circumscribed. We think of the present moment and look only at things seen. Let us, however, "look beyond the long dark night and hail the coming day." Let us see to what great end God is working, so that, out of the wreck and ruin of this world, He shall secure a Bride that will be suited for the love of Christ. What a thought, that the Spirit of God is here to form bridal affections in the hearts of believers in view of the day — the great day — the day of the marriage of the Lamb! To this end the Father sent the Spirit. To this end the Spirit is working on earth. To this end Christ is waiting in heaven. And will the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit fail in this great end? Will Divine Persons be disappointed? Impossible! Every purpose of God will have its glorious fulfilment. Nor shall we be disappointed if we think God's thoughts with God, and keep in view God's great purpose — the marriage of the Lamb.

2

Passing to the second section of the chapter (vv. 10-61), we have the deeply instructive account of the way the servant carries out his mission. He comes to Mesopotamia well equipped for his service, "All the goods of his master were in his hands" (v. 10), reminding us that the Holy Spirit has come to teach us "all things," to guide us into "all truth," and to show us "all things that the Father hath."

Arrived at Mesopotamia the servant carries out his mission in dependence upon God, and hence is found in prayer. His prayer shows how thoroughly he is engrossed with one object. He does not pray for himself; and though he mentions "the daughters of the men of the city," yet he does not pray for them. He prays that he may be led to the one that is appointed for Isaac. It is well to note that the servant is not there to select a bride from the daughters of the men of the city, and then make her suited for Isaac. He is there to find the one that is appointed for Isaac. And the sign that she is the appointed one will be that she is marked by grace. This surely is the force of the prayer, "Let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac" (v. 14). He will ask to be allowed to drink from her pitcher, and if she not only grants his request, but volunteers to do more than he asks, it will be the sign that she is characterized by the grace of God — that there is a work of God in her, and that she is thus of Isaac's kindred. For grace goes beyond our requests (Matthew 5:38-42). So it came to pass. Rebekah — one who is of the kindred of Isaac — is brought to light. Having found the appointed bride, the servant at once distinguishes her from all others by adorning her with the golden earrings and the bracelets. The hand and face bear witness to the work of grace (v. 22).

3

This, however, is only the beginning of the servant's work. No word has been yet uttered concerning Isaac. These further communications depend upon the welcome that is extended to the servant. If he is welcomed he will speak to them of Isaac, but he will not force his company

upon Rebekah, "Is there room in thy father’s house for us to lodge in?" (v. 23).

Very blessedly Rebekah’s answer again goes beyond the servant’s request. He only asks for "room"; she says there is provision as well as room (v. 25). Laban too can say to the servant, "Come in thou blessed of the Lord; wherefore standest thou without?" So we read "The man came into the house." Do we not discern in this part of the story the secret of our little progress in the knowledge of Christ, and why our affections are oft-times cold. We hinder and grieve the One who alone can powerfully affect our hearts with the love of Christ. A Divine Person — the Comforter — has come from the Father, from Christ, from heaven, but do we make Him welcome? Do we make "room" for Him?

It is well to take home to ourselves this great question, "Is there room?" Are we prepared to put ourselves about to make room for the Holy Spirit? The flesh and the Spirit "are contrary the one to the other" (Galatians 5:17). We cannot entertain the Spirit if ministering to the flesh. To make room for the Spirit, and to be minding the things of the flesh is impossible. Are we prepared to refuse the indulgence of the flesh in the passing things of time, in order to make room for the Spirit to lead us into the deep and eternal things of God? Are we making provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof, or are we making room and provision for the Spirit. "Room" and "provision" were made in the house of Bethuel for the servant of Abraham, with the result that the servant is able to speak of Isaac, to engage the affections of Rebekah with Isaac, and to lead her to Isaac.

Having come into the house (v. 32), the first thing the servant does is to bear witness to Isaac. He reveals the mind of his master concerning Isaac, and in so doing he takes of the things of Isaac and shows them unto Rebekah. He speaks of all the wealth of his master, and then says all this wealth has been given to Isaac, "Unto him hath he given all that he hash." And well we know that all the Father’s things have been given to Christ, as the Lord can say, "All things that the Father hath are mine," and then, speaking of the Holy Spirit, can add, "He shall take of mine and show it unto you" (John 16:15).

What, we may ask, must have been the effect upon Rebekah of hearing this witness to Isaac? Did it simply increase her knowledge of Isaac? This doubtless was one result, but it surely did more, much more, for it awakened love to Isaac. And love having been awakened, the servant brings forth jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment, and gives them to Rebekah. He adorns her with the beautiful things that came from Isaac. Thus too the Spirit would deal with ourselves. He unfolds to us the mind of the Father concerning Christ: He takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto us. Thus He awakens love to Christ, and then He adorns us with the beautiful things of Christ. He makes us the witnesses of redeeming love — the jewels of silver; the witnesses of divine righteousness — the gold; and the witnesses of practical sanctification — the raiment.

4

There follows, in picture, a further action of the Spirit. The servant has found the bride of the kindred of Isaac; he has distinguished her from all others with the earrings and the bracelet; he has awakened affection for Isaac; he has adorned her with the beautiful things of Isaac, now he will lead her to Isaac (vv. 54-60). The servant says, " Send me away to my master." He had come to Mesopotamia to secure the bride, and having accomplished that end he would fain be away. He had not come to tarry in Mesopotamia. The mind of the servant was to secure the bride, leave the

scene, and return to his master. It was not to secure the bride and settle her in the old home, but to secure the bride and lead her to a new home. And very blessedly he forms the same mind in Rebekah. He longs to be away and reach Isaac, and he creates the same desires in the heart of Rebekah. He wills to go, and she is made willing to go. Her relatives can understand that the servant would be away to his master, but they would fain retain Rebekah awhile — at least ten days. So they call the damsel and enquire at her mouth, only to discover how well the servant's work had been accomplished, and that his mind had been formed in her mind, so that if he was longing to go she was ready to go.

If we allow the Holy Spirit to have His way — if we hinder Him not — He will form our minds according to His mind. To think as He thinks about Christ; to disengage our hearts from the things where Christ is not, to engage them with Christ where He is.

Rebekah was not a penniless orphan; she had indeed a father and mother, a home in Mesopotamia with prospects of wealth and possessions in the land of her birth. To enjoy all these blessings she had no need to leave her native land and face a wilderness journey. Nevertheless all is left. She forgets her own people and her father's house, and she faces a wilderness journey to reach a person whom she has never seen. Such is the mighty attractive power of a person when faith and affection for that person have been awakened. In like manner the Holy Spirit has come to bring our hearts under the constraining influence of the love of Christ. He is here to take of the things of Christ and show them unto us. He is here to lead us into the deep things of God — things which "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man." He is able to so strengthen us in the inner man, "that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith that being rooted and grounded in love, we may be fully able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth and length, and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowing."

All this He is able and ready to do. How is it then we are so little attached in affection to Christ, and detached from things here? Is it not that we hinder? Hence the servant's word, "Hinder me not," should have a powerful voice for us. We may say we cannot enjoy these things apart from the Spirit's work and we cannot make the Spirit work. This may be true: but alas we can hinder the Spirit working. We can cling to the world, the politics of the world, the religion of the world, the pleasures of the world, and we may even be so engrossed with right things — country, kindred, and father's house — that we hinder the Holy Spirit.

Whether we allow the world to hinder, or not, depends not upon the world but upon ourselves. The brother and mother may seek to detain Rebekah. This they admit, for they say, "we will call the damsel and enquire at her mouth." If like Rebekah our answer is "I will go" then indeed the Spirit will so powerfully affect our hearts, that all the power and attraction of the world will be unable to detain us.

Thus it came to pass, "Rebekah arose . . . and followed the man." She put herself entirely under the guidance of the man, with the result "the servant took Rebekah and went his way" (v. 61). Not her way but his way. We are not always prepared for the way of the Spirit. It is a way that goes entirely across the will of the flesh. Further we do well to remember that following the leading of the Spirit does not mean following some "inner light." If following the Spirit we shall walk according to the Word. The Spirit does not lead apart from the Word nor contrary to the Word. The immediate result of following the man was that Rebekah found herself in a wilderness scene. She

had neither the home of Laban nor the house of Isaac. So with ourselves, as one has said, "We have neither the earth in which we are, nor heaven to which we are going." However, as she travelled the desert journey of four hundred miles she had a bright prospect before her, and on the way she had the servant to talk of the things of Isaac and show them unto her. At the end the person who had won her heart was waiting to receive her.

5 In the close of this beautiful story Isaac personally comes into view. In all these wilderness scenes Isaac has taken no active part, though not unmindful of all that was taking place. He comes from the well Lahairoi — a word of deep significance, for it means, "the well of Him that liveth and seeth" (Genesis 16:14). How good to know as we travel on our way, that at the end of the journey we shall find One who has not been unmindful of His people. He sees and He lives, yea the word is "He ever liveth" (Hebrews 7:25). But further Isaac came to meet Rebekah, for she asks, "What man is this that walketh in the field to meet us?" We travel on to the great meeting, but let us not forget that He is coming to meet us. The picture presents Isaac as one who was waiting for and wanting his bride. Our desires after Christ may often be feeble, but His longings are toward His Bride. He can say, "If I go away I will come again and receive you unto Myself." And the meeting time is not far off. When at last Rebekah lifted up her eyes and saw Isaac, she lighted off the camel for the journey was over; and when at last we see Him face to face our journey will be over. And it will not be long, the night is far spent, the day is at hand. When the moment comes our translation will not take long; only the twinkling of an eye and we shall be there.

After the meeting Rebekah took a veil and covered herself. The bride made herself ready and the marriage followed, for "Isaac took Rebekah . . . and she became his wife and he loved her." So too after our wilderness journey is over, after the great meeting, when for the first time we see Him face to face — when He receives us to Himself — then we read, "the marriage of the Lamb is come and His wife hath made herself ready." The Church will be presented to Christ all glorious not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing — "holy and without blemish." Then indeed it will be manifest that Christ has found an object suited for His love, and responsive to His love, and He will be satisfied. He will look upon His Bride and say, "I am satisfied." "He shall see of the fruit of the travail of His soul and be satisfied." As this glorious prospect opens up before our vision, how all the lustre of this world grows dim; how dull its fairest prospects, how poor its riches. How vain its passing pleasures, and how empty its honours in the light of these coming glories.

H. S.

S. The Brokenhearted.

The Brokenhearted.

Psalms 147:2-4;Luke 4:18.

Hamilton Smith. In the fourth chapter of the Gospel of Luke we have the touching record of the Lord’s entrance upon His public ministry in this world of sin and sorrow; and we learn, from His own lips, the character of His ministry. Quoting Isaiah’s prophecy concerning Himself, He says, "The spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor, He hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted." The world is full of broken hearts. It may endeavour to cover up its sorrow with a mirth and laughter but, says the preacher, in the book of Proverbs, "Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful" (Proverbs 14:13). Underneath all the outward gaiety of the world there are secret sorrows and broken hearts.

Turning to the word of God, we discover for our comfort that God is not indifferent to these broken hearts. The Psalmist tells us that God is One that "healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds." Moreover, the Psalmist immediately adds, "He telleth the number of the stars, He calleth them all by names. Great is our Lord" (Psalms 147:2-5). The number of the stars is too great for us to tell; the sorrow of a broken heart too deep for us to fathom; but God can count the stars in heaven and heal the broken hearts on earth. In the greatness of His love He gave His only begotten Son to come into this world to heal the brokenhearted. When we look at Jesus, we at last see One perfect Man who came into this world to seek broken hearts. The devil, indeed, sought to turn Him from His quest, by offering Him all the kingdoms of this world and their glory. But, refusing the world, its honours, and its riches, He chose to become a poor Man seeking brokenhearted men in order to dry their tears, and heal their wounds. As we trace His path through this valley of tears, in search of broken hearts, we see Him, in the Gospel of Luke, healing the heart of a brokenhearted sinner; binding up the wounds of a brokenhearted saint, and drying the tears of a brokenhearted widow. Moreover, we learn that such was the wickedness and hardness of man’s heart that at last His heart was broken. We broke the heart of the One who came to heal our broken hearts.

Thus we discover that hearts are broken by the sins of the sinner, by the failures of the saints, by the death of our loved ones, and above all, by unrequited love.

1. THE BROKENHEARTED SINNER (Luke 7:36-38) In the touching scene that took place in Simon the Pharisee’s house we are permitted to gaze upon that most wonderful sight — a meeting between the Saviour and the sinner. A poor woman who was known in the city as a sinner — and therefore we may conclude a fallen woman — had heard of Jesus. She had heard the people saying that Jesus was, "A Friend of publicans and sinners." She had probably heard, from His own lips, that gracious invitation, "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Weary of her terrible life, with a conscience burdened with her sins, without a friend in the world, she hears of Jesus, the Son of God. She hears that He is the Friend of sinners and that

He bids her come.

Driven by her need, and drawn by His grace, she comes to Jesus; and in this fine scene we are permitted to see the result of a sinner coming to the Saviour. She felt that, at all cost, she must get into the presence of this wonderful Saviour. So she enters the Pharisee’s house and goes straight to the feet of Jesus. At first no word is spoken, but two things happen, for we read, "She stood at His feet behind Him weeping," and she "kissed His feet." Those tears tell of a heart that is broken; those kisses of a heart that is won.

What was it that broke her heart? What was it that won her heart? Was it not that she saw her life, with all its sins, in the presence of His heart with all its love and grace? She discovered that His grace was greater than her sins, and that though He knew the worst about her, yet He loved her, and did not drive her away or utter one word of reproach. She could hold out against the scorn of men, and the sneers of the Pharisee, but such love as this broke her heart. It is not the badness of man, but the goodness of God that leads to repentance (Romans 2:4).

Having broken her heart by His grace He binds up her heart with His words of love, for, He says, "Thy sins are forgiven . . . thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace" (Vv. 48-50). The way of this brokenhearted woman is still the way of blessing for any poor sinner.

First we are made conscious of our sins and need.

Secondly, God in His grace brings us the good news of the only One who can meet our need. We hear of the Saviour who came into the world to save sinners, who has given Himself a ransom for all, and offered Himself without spot to God, and so satisfied God by His mighty work on the cross, that God can proclaim forgiveness to a world of sinners, and invite whosoever will to believe in Jesus.

Thirdly we learn, that believing in Him we may know on the authority of God’s word that our sins are forgiven and our souls saved (Acts 11:20-21; Acts 10:43).

Blessed moment when having learned our need and heard of Jesus we believe and turn to Him, to find ourselves alone in His presence, conscious of our sins but realising that, in spite of knowing all our sins, He loves us. Such love will break our hearts and win them for ever.

2. THE BROKENHEARTED SAINT (Luke 22:54-62)

We have looked at a brokenhearted sinner in the house of Simon the Pharisee; now we are permitted to see a brokenhearted backslider in the house of the high priest. We may truly have our sins forgiven, and love the Lord with all the ardour and sincerity of the Apostle Peter, and yet, but for the grace of the Lord, we may, like the Apostle, break down and deny the Lord. Through storm and sunshine this devoted servant had followed hard after his Master during the years of His wonderful ministry; but there comes a day when he "followed afar off." Walking at a distance from his Master he is soon found in the company of the enemies of his Master. So we read that when the enemies of the Lord "had kindled a fire," and "were set down together," that "Peter sat down among them." Sitting among the Lord’s enemies it is not long before he enters into temptation. It seemed, indeed, only a small temptation for it comes from "a certain maid." Alas! away from the Lord, in bad association, a very little thing is sufficient to trip us up. The maid may be weak enough, but she has poor Peter at an advantage for she saw him "as he sat by the fire." All she

says is, "This man was also with Him." Peter scents danger, so without hesitation, the man who in his self-confidence had said, "I am ready to go with Thee, both into prison, and to death," flatly denies the Lord, saying, "Woman, I know Him not."

Three times he denies the Lord, and then, according to the words of the Lord "The cock crew." Peter has denied the Lord; but has the Lord's heart changed toward Peter? Blessed be His Name, His love is an unchanging love; "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." So it came to pass, that at the very moment when Peter turned from the Lord, the Lord turned to Peter, for we read, "the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter." We may grieve His heart but we cannot change His love. We may be sure that that look was a look of infinite love that seemed to say to Peter, "You have denied Me, Peter, you have said that you do not know Me, but in spite of all your denials I love you."

What was the effect of that look? It broke the heart of the poor backsliding Peter; for we read, "Peter went out, and wept bitterly." Like the fallen sinner of Luke 7:1-50, the backsliding saint of Luke 22:1-71, sees his sins in the light of the Lord's love; and the love that rose above his sins broke his heart.

We know, too, on the resurrection day, the tender way love took to heal this brokenhearted man and drive away his tears. So in all our backslidings, He restores our souls, by breaking our hearts and winning our hearts with His unchanging love.

3. THE BROKENHEARTED WIDOW (Luke 7:11-15) The story of the brokenhearted widow reminds us that over the fairest scenes of this world there lies the dark shadow of death. Nain means "pleasant," and the situation of the city was beautiful, but death was there. Then for our comfort we learn that into this world of death the Lord of life had come, and not alone with power to raise the dead, but with the love and sympathy that can feel for us in our sorrows, dry our tears, and heal the brokenhearted. So "it came to pass" that Jesus went into the city of Nain, and "His disciples went with Him and much people." This company with the Lord of life in the midst, meets another company with a dead body in the midst; for, as the Lord came nigh to the city, "a dead man was carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her." How beautiful is the way the Lord takes to heal her broken heart. Moved with compassion, He first dries her tears, and then removes the cause of her sorrow. Had we the power we should probably have first raised the dead, and then said to the woman, "Weep no more." But Jesus takes another way — a better way — that makes the story so full of comfort for us all. He first says to the brokenhearted mother, "Weep not," and then He raises the dead. Thus the woman would have been able to say, "In my great sorrow He came so near to me, that He wiped away my tears. He not only took me out of my sorrowful circumstances, but He walked beside me in them." Thus He shows by His compassion and sympathy that He can wipe away our tears, before He raises our dead. This suits our case, for Jesus is gone, and He does not yet raise our loved ones when taken from us, but He speaks comfort to our broken hearts, and dries our tears, while we wait for the day when He will raise our loved ones who have fallen asleep in Jesus. His compassions go before His mercies. We have the comfort of His love while we wait for the display of His resurrection power. Then indeed, that word will be fulfilled, "God shall wipe away all tears . . . and there shall be no more death." A few short years and all is o'er, Your sorrow, pain, will soon pass by Then lean in faith on God's dear Son, He'll wipe the tear from every eye.

4. THE BROKENHEARTED SAVIOUR (Luke 19:41-48)

We have seen that our sins, and our backslidings, seen in the light of His love can break our hearts, and that death can cast its shadow over the fairest scene and break our hearts. But in this touching scene on the Mount of Olives we see a yet deeper sorrow — the sorrow of unrequited love. We at times may have our hearts broken by unrequited love, but, even as the Saviour's love rises above all other loves, so, when His love is flung back in His face, He feels, in measure beyond all others, the sorrow of unrequited love. The depth of His sorrow can only be measured by the height of His love. So we read, "When He was come near, He beheld the city, and wept over it." His love had been lavished on these poor people, but they only rewarded Him evil for good, and hatred for His love (Psalms 109:5). When He told them that He had come to heal the brokenhearted, they were "filled with wrath, and rose up, and thrust Him out of the city" (Luke 4:1-44). When He forgave sins, they charged Him with blasphemy (Luke 5:1-39). When He healed a poor cripple, they were filled with madness (Luke 6:1-39). When He received poor sinners, and ate with them, they said He was a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber (Luke 7:1-50). When He goes to raise a dead girl, they laugh Him to scorn (Luke 8:1-56); and when He delivers a man from the devil they say, "He casteth out devils by Beelzebub, the chief of devils" (Luke 11:1-54).

They opened their mouths against Him, they spoke against Him with a lying tongue, and fought against Him without cause, and for His love they were His enemies (Psalms 109:2-5). Nevertheless, man's heartless treatment drew forth no expression of indignation from Christ, no bitter and revengeful word fell from His lips. When He was reviled, He reviled not again, and when He suffered He threatened not. The hardness of our hearts only called forth a sorrow that found expression in His tears. We broke His heart at last, for He could say, "I am poor and needy, and my heart is wounded within me." And having broken His heart we sought to "slay the broken in heart" (Psalms 109:16, Psalms 109:22). So we read "the chief priests and the scribes and the chief of the people sought to destroy Him." What a scene! Outside the city, the heartbroken Saviour weeping over sinners: inside, hardened sinners seeking to destroy the Saviour — seeking to shed the blood of the One who shed His tears over them. In yet a little while there will be a glorious answer to those tears for very soon He will be surrounded by a great host of brokenhearted sinners saved by grace and backsliding saints restored by grace, in a scene where "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." Then, "He shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied."

I cannot tell how silently He suffered, As with His peace He graced this place of tears, Or how His heart upon the cross was broken, The crown of pain to three-and-thirty years. But this I know, He heals the brokenhearted, And stays our sin and calms our lurking fear, And lifts the burden from the heavy laden, For yet the Saviour, Saviour of the world is here.

S. The Call of God.

The Call of God.

2 Timothy 1:9;Romans 8:28-29;Hebrews 11:8.

Hamilton Smith.

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Scripture makes it abundantly clear that believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are both "saved" and "called." We read in 2 Timothy 1:9, God "hath saved us and called us with an holy calling." But while every true believer knows something of the blessedness of God’s salvation, comparatively few enter into the joy of the calling.

Alas! it is feared, that with many, "calling" is but a term occasionally met with in Scripture, conveying very little definite meaning to the mind, and hence having very little power over the life. Yet nothing will so powerfully affect the outlook of a Christian, the manner of his life, and the character of his associations, as the realization of the call of God.

It must be remembered there is the deeply serious call to the sinner, of which we read in the story of the Garden of Eden when "the Lord God called unto Adam . . . Where art thou?" (Genesis 3:9). This was calling a sinner to account for his sin. Then again there is the important call to the servant as when the Holy Spirit said, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them" (Acts 13:2). Both these calls have their place in the ways of God, but it is neither the call to the sinner, nor the call to the servant to which we refer, but rather the call to the saint. That great call is the common portion of all saints, however slow they may be in responding and entering into the blessedness of it. The call of God came to us in the Gospel by which we were saved (2 Timothy 1:9-10), though it may be at the time we but feebly, if at all, realized that God had called us. Naturally our first concern was salvation from the judgment of God, and rightly our souls were filled with gratitude for this great salvation. Little did we realize that God had something far greater before Him than the salvation of our souls, that God had a glorious purpose for us, and in view of the accomplishment of that purpose He had called us. Yet so it was, for, while the salvation of God has in view our deliverance from judgment, the call of God has in view the accomplishment of God’s purpose. Thus we read in Romans 8:28, of the "called according to His purpose."

What a transcendent thought! God has a purpose for His people, settled before the foundation of the world, and in order to accomplish that purpose He has called us. He saved us because we needed saving. He has called us because He wanted us. Thus it is the privilege of each believer to say: "Though God is so great, and I am so small, yet God wants me, and wanting me, He has called me."

It will help us to understand the spiritual meaning of the call of God if we ponder the story of Abraham. He was the first of the Old Testament saints who was called of God. There were other

men of faith before his day. Abel had suffered for faith in the world. Enoch walked by faith through the world: Noah was saved by faith from a ruined world. But not until Abraham's day do we hear of a saint being called out of the world. The world was one thousand eight hundred years old before God called a man out of it. A little thought will show the reason for this. Until the days of Abraham, things were not ripe for the call of God; for if God calls a man out of the world it means that the moment has arrived when manifestly the world is a doomed world, and that God has done with it. God may go on with it for a time, as indeed He has for long centuries, and in the ways of God a great deal may be worked out in it, but from the moment God calls a man out of the world, we may be certain that, not only the world has done with God, but that God has done with the world as such.

Moreover, the call of God not only means that God has done with this present evil world, but that the moment has arrived when God begins to reveal to faith the great secret, that He has another world in view — a world where all is according to Himself.

Thus the call of Abraham was an entirely new departure in the ways of God. And the new principle on which God commenced to work four thousand years ago, is the principle on which God is working to-day, though with the coming of Christ, His death, and session at the right hand of God, the call of God has been made known in far greater fulness and distinctness.

There are two aspects of the call both very definitely set forth in the history of Abraham. We read in Hebrews 11:8, that "he was called to go out," referring to the world that he was to leave behind. Then we read, "he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance." Here the new world into which he was called is in view. Stephen also refers to these two aspects of the call of Abraham, for he tells us that God said to Abraham, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall show thee" (Acts 7:3). THE WORLD FROM WHICH HE WAS CALLED. The tenth and eleventh chapters of Genesis portray the terrible character of the world out of which Abraham was called. Three things marked that world. First it was an apostate world that had fallen into idolatry. This we know from Joshua's last words to Israel as recorded in Joshua 24:2. He reminds them that their fathers, together with Terah, the father of Abraham, "served other gods." Idolatry shut out the true God by setting up gods according to man's evil imagination. It meant that man had apostatized from God, and that God was excluded from man's world.

Second it was a world in which man glorified himself, for they said, "Go to, let us build us a city, and a tower whose top may reach unto heaven, and let us make us a name." It was a world that not only dishonoured God, but glorified man.

Finally the eleventh chapter ends with the gloom of death. "Terah died in Haran." The world that excludes God, and glorifies man, is a world that is in the grip of death. Men may acquire great renown, like Nimrod who was a mighty one in the earth; they may build great cities like Asshur, or attempt to build a tower whose top shall reach to heaven, like the men of Babel, but in the end the mighty one has to bow before a still mightier, the city crumbles to dust, the tower becomes a heap, and death reigns over all.

Such was the world from which Abraham was called. A world from which God was excluded, in which man was exalted, and over which death reigned. And as the world was then, so is the world

today. The present evil world had its commencement in the days that followed the flood. The Apostle Peter, referring to the world before the flood, calls it "the world that then was" (2 Peter 3:6). That world has passed away forever; but he immediately goes on to speak of "the heavens and the earth which are now." Here he refers to the world that commenced after the flood. And as it commenced in excluding God, exalting man, and feeding death, so it has continued, and so will it end in one last furious outburst of apostasy from God, exaltation of man, and the devastation of death.

Evidently a world of this character will not do for God. The word to Abraham in his day was, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house;" and the word in our day is, "Come out from among them and be ye separate" (2 Corinthians 6:17); and in regard to the Babylonish corruptions of Christendom the word is, "Come out of her, My people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" (Revelation 18:4).

This, however, is only one aspect of the call of God. There is, as we have seen, another and very blessed aspect, THE WORLD TO WHICH WE ARE CALLED.

If the history of Abraham instructs us as to the character of man's world, it also gives us bright intimations of God's world. It will be remembered that Stephen commences his address before the Jewish council by recalling the history of Abraham. He says, "The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham." He does not say the God of earth, but the God of glory; that is, the God of another world — a world of glory. In Scripture the great thought of glory is God displayed. The God of glory implies the God of a scene where God is perfectly set forth according to His nature and attributes. Surrounded as we are, on every hand, by a world in which the evil of man's heart is displayed, from which God is excluded, where man is exalted, and death reigns, and with our sensibilities dulled by constant contact with such a world, we find it hard to realize the infinite blessedness of a world where God is fully displayed — where everything speaks of the love, holiness, wisdom and might of God, and hence a scene of perfect joy and rest, where sin, and sorrow, and death can never come. A world of glory such as this is the very antithesis of this present evil world. But not only has this world been brought to light, but God's purpose to have His people in this new world of glory has been disclosed, for if the God of glory appears to a man it is in order that a man may appear in the glory of God. This, too, comes before us very blessedly in the story of Stephen. For if he opens his address with the God of glory appearing to a man, he closes by witnessing to the Man that appears in the glory of God. He "looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God." The Spirit of God, by Stephen, thus brings before us a new world of glory, and a new Man in that glory, and therefore One who is perfectly suited to a scene where God is fully displayed. Moreover, the Apostle Paul tells us that those who are called according to the purpose of God are predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son (Romans 8:28-29). As these truths gain an entrance to our souls, in all their greatness and grandeur, we begin to realize the exceeding blessedness of that call which introduces us to a world of glory, there to be conformed to the image of the Man in the glory. Well may we sing, — And is it so! we shall be like Thy Son, Is this the grace which He for us has won?

Father of glory, thought beyond all thought: In glory, to His own blest likeness brought.

Having seen the character of the call, as regards the world from which we are called, as well as the world to which we are called, we may well inquire what is THE PRESENT EFFECT OF THE CALL ON THE PEOPLE OF GOD?

Here, again, the history of Abraham will afford us rich instruction. It is evident that the call of God entirely altered the course of his life. Moreover, it is equally clear that this change was only brought about in the measure in which he responded to the call. The call of God became a test for Abraham's faith, just as indeed it becomes a test for each one of God's people to-day. Herein lies the test: Has the call of God in all its greatness, grandeur, and blessedness, such a hold over our affections that it becomes paramount over every other consideration? In the case of Abraham, God said: "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, into a land that I will show thee." This, indeed, was a severe test for Abraham's faith. Was the call of God of such supreme importance and blessedness in his eyes, that in obedience to the call he could leave entirely behind, country, kindred, and father's house? We know in the actual history of Abraham that, for a time, he was held back by his father's house. In the case of Abraham he was called literally to leave the country of his birth, his kindred and his father's house. In the case of the Christian the call does not take this literal character, but none the less we are called to be morally apart from country, kindred and father's house. And, if morally apart, it may lead to the Christian being cast out from the political, social, and even family circle, as in the case of the blind man of John 9:1-41. In any case the moment comes in our history when we have to decide which is to be paramount, the mighty call of God, or the insistent claims of country, kindred, and father's house.

If we obey the call the effect will be threefold.

First, we shall become strangers and pilgrims on the earth. It was so with Abraham and those associated with him. They heard the call of God, they saw "afar off" the blessed prospect unrolled before them in the promises that spoke of the heavenly country, and the city of God, with the result, that they, being persuaded of the promises, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

Secondly, having accepted the path of strangership, we shall become witnesses for God on the earth. And so with Abraham we read that, having become strangers and pilgrims, "they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country." The man that declares plainly as a witness for God, is the man that answers to the call of God.

Thirdly, having answered to the call, and taken up the path of strangership, and thus declared plainly for God, we acquire fresh blessing for our souls and thus make spiritual progress in light. It was so with Abraham, he received no further light from God until he had answered to the call. But having responded to the call, God appeared to him for the second time, and gave him further light, speaking to him of the Seed, and saying, "Unto thy seed will I give this land" (Genesis 12:7). The vast vista of glory unrolled to faith in the call of God makes this world's fading glories look very small and dim. And if once seen in their true proportions it becomes no great hardship to leave them behind. And if "for a moment" the call of God may involve some measure of "light affliction" what matters it, since we know that on beyond there is "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." May the call of God become so real, so definite, so great to each one of us, that, like Paul of old, we may say, "forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ

Jesus," and thus truly be able to sing, —

Called from above, and heavenly men by birth (Who once were but the citizens of earth) As pilgrims here, we seek a heavenly home Our portion in the ages yet to come.

Chapter 48

S. The Christian Company.

The Christian Company.

John 15:9-16.

Hamilton Smith. As we listen to the Lord’s gracious words, recorded in John 13:1-38 and John 14:1-31 : telling of His service for believers in feet-washing, to keep us in communion with Himself; telling us that He has gone to prepare a place for us in the Father’s house; that He is coming again to receive us unto Himself in the glory, and that between His going away and coming again for us, He will come to us and manifest Himself to us through the Holy Spirit — as these blessed truths pass before us — we realise that the leading truth therein is that Christ is for us. Then, as we pass to John 15:1-27 and John 16:1-33, and listen to the Lord tenderly exhorting His disciples to bear fruit, to follow Him as His disciples, and witness for Him in a world in which He is hated and rejected, and hear His warning that in this world we may expect persecution and tribulation, we further realise the great underlying truth is that we are to be for Christ. Moreover, there is surely a divine order in the way in which the truth is presented, for we must first be thoroughly established in the great truth that Christ is for us before we can, in any little measure, be here for Him. In John 15:1-8, the great truth brought before us is fruit-bearing. This division of the discourse closes with the words, "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." Then, at the close of the chapter, the Lord refers to the coming of the Holy Spirit, with the result that the disciples become witnesses for Christ. Fruit is the lovely character of Christ reproduced in the lives of believers in the power of the Holy Spirit. In as far as this fruit of the Spirit — "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, meekness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23) — is found in us, the Father will be glorified and it will be manifest that we are disciples of Christ, and, in as far as we follow Christ we shall become witnesses to Christ in the world from which He was cast out. Thus we realise that it is the Lord’s desire that believers should be in this world for the glory of the Father, known as disciples of Christ, and witnesses for Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Fruit-bearing, discipleship, and witnessing, are the great themes of chapter 15. Moreover, in verses 9 to 16 the Lord sets before us a most beautiful picture of the new Christian company, with the outstanding moral characteristics of that company according to the mind of the Lord. These express, indeed, the desires of the heart of Christ for the whole Christian company, but what should mark the whole company should surely be true of any little local company of His people. Therefore in a day of ruin when the great Christian profession has wandered far from the Lord’s revealed mind, it is still possible for two or three gathered to His Name in any locality to seek to be marked by the characteristics that are pleasing to Him. We may well challenge our hearts as to how far we have done so. The Lord opens this part of His discourse with the words: — "As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you: abide in my love (N. Tn.). Thus, the first great outstanding mark of the Christian company is that it is loved by the Lord, and the desire of His heart is that believers should walk together in the realisation of His love, and thus answer to His words, "Abide in my love." The Lord gives the love of the Father to Himself as the measure and manner of His love to believers. The Lord speaks, not of the Father’s love to the Son

in eternity, but the love of the Father to the Son incarnate — to Jesus as Man. This was a love that entered into all the sorrows of His path, all the enmity He had to meet, and the sufferings He had to endure. In the same way we are loved by Christ with a love that enters into all our trials, feels for us in perfect sympathy in all our sorrows, and, in our case bears with us in all our failures, and restores our souls when we have wandered far from Him. Whatever we have to meet we can count upon a love that never changes and will continue to the end. In the conscious sense of this love the Lord would have us to continue. The exhortation to abide in His love leads to the second great mark that the Lord desires to be found in the Christian company. He would have His people marked by obedience to His commands. His words are: "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love" (V. 10). Very happily one has said, "The love of Christ rests on the way of obedience, and shines along the path of His commandments. The keeping His commandments does not create the love, any more than walking in sunny places creates the sunshine; and accordingly the exhortation is not to seek or merit or obtain the love, but to remain in it by continuing in the state arid life to which alone it belongs."

Again, the Lord sets Himself before us as the One who, in His path as a Man, is the perfect example of obedience. He could say, "I do always those things that please Him" (John 8:29). Whatever the cost to Him, be it insult, shame and spitting, He was obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross. Never seeking His own will, ever walking in obedience to the Father's will, He abode in the sunshine of the Father's love! The third great mark of the Christian company is "joy" , as the Lord can say: "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (v.11). The Lord speaks of this joy as "My joy," and further that it may be "in you." As regards outward circumstances, He was the Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, but He ever walked in the inward joy of the Father's love, and the glorious prospect before Him. He could rejoice in spirit in carrying out the Father's will, and for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross and despised the shame, and the contradiction of sinners, that He had to meet (Luke 10:21; Hebrews 12:2-3). The Psalmist could say, "Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and wine increased" (Psalms 4:7). The world's joy depends upon prosperous circumstances — the increase of the corn and wine. The believer's joy is that inward gladness of heart that finds its springs in the unchanging love of the Lord, and the glorious prospect that only faith can enter into. In these verses the Lord speaks of, "My love," "My commandments," and "My joy," and these marks follow in beautiful order. The Lord's unchanging love is over all; walking in obedience to His commands we shall abide in His love, and abiding in His love we shall taste of His joy. The fourth great mark of the Christian company comes before us in the Lord's words: — "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Vv. 12, 13). The Christian company is not only loved by the Lord, but it is His command that they should love one another. As with the previous marks, Christ is the perfect pattern of what He enjoins upon His people, so now, this love to one another finds its perfect expression in Christ's love to His people. We are loved as He was loved; we are to obey as He obeyed; we are to rejoice with His joy, and to love one another as He loved us.

Such was His love that He could lay down His life for His friends. Here His death is not viewed in its atoning character, which could be no pattern for us, but as the highest expression of love for

one’s friends. It has been truly said that in these verses there "is condensed a whole history of love in the love of the Father to the Son, the love of Jesus to His people, the love of His people to one another; each stage being both the source and the standard for the next." The fifth great mark of the Christian company is that they should be distinguished as being treated by the Lord as His friends. He can say: — "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you" (v. 15). It will be noticed that this high privilege of being treated as the friends of the Lord is contingent on our obedience to His commands. He has told us that His command is that we love one another. The company in which love prevails is the company that the Lord will treat as His friends. A friend is one in whom we confide; to whom we can freely unfold our thoughts, our feelings, and the purposes of our hearts. Obviously we only open our hearts to those in whose love we can trust. Believers have the true privilege to be the servants of the Lord. The Apostles Paul, Peter, John and James, as well as Jude, delight to describe themselves as the servants of the Lord Jesus (Romans 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1; Revelation 1:1; Jude 1:1). But if the privilege of being servants is great, the privilege of being friends is yet greater. Viewed simply as servants we only need the plain directions of the Lord to carry out our allotted task. Treated as friends we are let into the secrets of the Lord’s heart as to the great end of all service. Thus, treating His disciples as friends, the Lord can say, "All things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.’’ Thus service can be taken up in the intelligence of the Lord’s mind, in fellowship with the glorious end in view — the carrying out of the deep eternal counsels of the Father’s heart. A sixth mark of the Christian company is that they are chosen by the Lord. He can say: — "Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain" (v. 16). How blessed to realise that our eternal links with Christ do not depend upon our choice, but His. Knowing His absolute perfection, and that He is "altogether lovely," we might well have chosen Him. The wonder of grace is, that knowing all our imperfection, and foreseeing all our failures, He should have chosen us. Having chosen us, He will never go back on His choice. He may, indeed, have to deal with us because of our failures, but He never flings away His pearls because of the specks of dirt that may be found upon them. But not only has He chosen us to share with Him His home and Kingdom glories, but, in the meantime He has set us to serve Him and bring forth fruit that may abide, whether that fruit be souls saved by grace, or saints established in all the counsels of the Father’s heart. Writing to the Colossian saints, the Apostle Paul can speak of the gospel of the grace of God coming to them and bringing forth fruit in the conversion of sinners. Writing to the saints at Rome, he expresses his desire to see them and impart some spiritual gift to them to the end that they might be established in the truth and that thus he might have "some fruit" among the saints (Colossians 1:6; Romans 1:11-13). The seventh great mark that should characterise the Christian company is dependence upon the Father. The Lord desires that every other mark that we have considered should lead up to this, that there may be found a company on earth of whom He can say: "That whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My Name, He may grant it you" (v. 16). If we are to be the servants of the Lord, if we are to bring forth fruit that shall abide, it can only be as we are kept in dependence upon the Father — a dependence which finds its expression in prayer in the Name of the Lord. Moreover, behind our prayers the Lord’s words imply that we are in the condition set forth in this part of His discourse. Then, indeed, we should pray in accord with His mind and thus be able to count upon answers to our prayers.

Thus we learn that during the time of His absence the Lord would have a people on earth, (1) Abiding in the conscious sense of His love, (2) Obeying His commands, (3) Enjoying His joy, (4) Loving one another, (5) Treated as His friends, (6) Chosen by Him for His service, and (7) Dependent upon the Father. Let us remember that in all this beautiful picture there is no mention of great gifts that might bring particular individuals into prominence amongst the saints and make a display before the world. It is rather the moral conditions that should mark the life of the whole Christian company, that the Lord sets before us, and that are of such value in His eyes, and without which all activity in service will be of little value. Moreover, though, alas! we have so little answered to the Lord's mind let us remember that there is nothing in the Lord's instruction that is not possible for any little company of saints to carry out in a day of ruin. May we then have grace to judge our condition in the light of the perfect pattern and seek, by that same grace, to answer to the expressed desires of the Lord, and thus, in some little measure become witnesses for Him in the time of His absence. H. SMITH.

S. The Comforts of the Lord.

The Comforts of the Lord.

Psalms 94:19.

Hamilton Smith (Extracted from Scripture Truth Vol. 43, 1969, pages 74-6.) The Ninety-fourth Psalm very blessedly sets forth the way in which a godly man can experience the comforts of God in the midst of suffering, and find "rest from the days of adversity " (Verses 13, 19). The suffering, of which the Psalmist speaks, arises from living a godly life in the midst of a godless world, — a world in which for the time being "the wicked triumph" (3), in which they "speak hard things" against God and His people (4); in which they exalt themselves (4), crush God's people, and afflict God's heritage (5), act with violence towards the defenceless (6), and defy God (7). The circumstances in which the Christian finds himself may be very different to those of the Psalmist, but the comfort and instruction of the Psalm still applies, for it ever remains true that "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12). Moreover, we may find that the most painful form of suffering will come from the professing people of God. So the Apostle found when, on account of his pious life, he was deserted by all in Asia, opposed by false teachers, and insulted by malicious individuals (2 Timothy 1:15; 2 Timothy 2:25, 2 Timothy 4:14).

Nevertheless, whether in the day of the Psalmist, or in the last days of Christendom, the one who seeks to walk in obedience to God will find that the time of suffering becomes a season of blessing. If, however, we are to obtain the blessing in the time of suffering, we must, in the first place, give up all thought of taking our case into our own hands and seeking to revenge ourselves upon those who unjustly oppose and abuse us. Whatever the suffering, the believer is to refrain from taking vengeance. When reviled the flesh is ever ready to revile again, and when suffering unjustly it is ready to threaten, and would delight in taking vengeance upon all who oppose and insult us with their hard speeches. But the godly are not to render evil for evil, or railing for railing. The LORD cannot trust the believer to deal with those who oppose. Vengeance belongeth to the LORD (Verse 1). Are we then, as believers, helpless and resourceless in the presence of those who "speak hard things" against others, while boasting in themselves (v. 4). So far from being helpless the Psalm shows that we have the greatest possible resource. The LORD, Himself, is the resource of the godly. Faith falls back on the great fact that nothing escapes the LORD. He hears the hard speeches: He sees every wrong act; He knows every secret motive. "He that planted the ear, shall He not hear? He that formed the eye, shall He not see?" "He that teacheth man knowledge, shall He not know?" (Vv. 8-11). The maliciously disposed may speak hard things about the godly, and stander them in secret, but the LORD hears, the LORD sees, the LORD knows.

Moreover, in making the trial an occasion of turning to the LORD, the believer will find great blessing. He will learn that all the trials and sufferings that come upon us are permitted of the LORD, and are part of His chastening. Receiving blessing through the chastening, he will be able to say "Blessed is the man whom thou chasteness, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law" (v.

12). The devil would seek to occupy our thoughts with the trial to bring in distance between our souls and the LORD. He would seek to engross our minds with the hard speeches and unjust acts of our opposers and thus lead us to "fret," and. "grieve," and complain in bitterness of soul, like Hannah of old (1 Samuel 1:6, 1 Samuel 1:8; 1 Samuel 1:10). Faith, making the trial an occasion of turning to the LORD, not only triumphs over the devil, but, gets blessing out of the trial.

Turning to the LORD, our opposers and their hard speeches cease to engross our thoughts and, alone with the LORD, we learn that He is allowing the trial for our blessing. Thus we keep the LORD between ourselves and the trial, instead of allowing the trial to come between ourselves and the LORD.

We learn that if the LORD allows men to "speak hard things" and act maliciously towards us, He will use the trial to correct much in our thoughts, and words, and ways, that He sees to be inconsistent with Himself. He does not chasten willingly; He sees there is a needs be for the trial. Thereby we discover the unsuspected evil of our own hearts, that we may judge the flesh, and say with Job, "I abhor myself." It is one thing to admit the truth of the doctrine that in the flesh there is no good thing; it is quite another to learn this truth experimentally in the presence of God.

Further, looking beyond the immediate trial, and seeing the LORD’S hand dealing with us for our blessing, will lead to rest and calmness of soul. Instead of fretting and bitterness of soul, we shall find "rest from the days of adversity." (v. 13). Even so, Hannah found in her sore trial, when she turned to the LORD, "poured out her soul before the LORD," and was "no more sad." Her circumstances were not changed, but she was changed, for, by pouring out her soul before the LORD, she passed from bitterness of soul to rest of soul (1 Samuel 1:15, 1 Samuel 1:18).

Moreover, in the loving chastening of the LORD, we not only learn to detect and judge the evil of our own hearts, but, we also discover the goodness and grace of the LORD’S heart. Thus, in the portion of the Psalm that follows, verses 14 to 20, the godly man is occupied with the LORD and all that He is on behalf of His own.

First, he realises that though the LORD may chasten, He "will not cast off His people, neither will He forsake His heritage" (14). So the Apostle, in his day, can remind believers that the Lord has said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Hebrews 13:5)

Secondly, he finds that the LORD is his helper. If I am not to take vengeance upon my enemies, "Who will rise up for me against the evil doers? or Who will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity?" Experience answers these questions, for, says the Psalmist, "Unless the LORD had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence." So again, the Apostle, realising that the Lord will never forsake the godly man, can boldly say, "The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear" (Hebrews 13:6).

Thirdly, the godly man finds that he not only requires help because of his enemies, but, he needs to be held because of his own weakness. So he can say, "When I said, my foot slippeth; thy mercy, O LORD held me up" (v. 18).

Thus the Psalmist, very blessedly realises in trial that the LORD will not forsake us, the LORD is our help, and the LORD will hold us up. So too the prophet Isaiah links these three things together when he says, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: . . . I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee;

yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness" (Isaiah 41:10-13).

Bringing then our sufferings to the LORD we not only obtain "rest from the days of adversity" but we find the "comforts of the LORD." We learn that He is with us, to help us in all our sufferings, and hold us in all our weakness. Thus the "anxious thoughts," which would distract the soul, give place,to the comforts of the LORD that delight the soul (v. 19 N.Tn). With the LORD before his soul as an Object, and the comforts of the LORD filling the soul, the wicked are no longer feared. As the Apostle can say, at a later day, "In nothing terrified by your adversaries" (Php 1:28). They may "gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous," but the LORD is his "defence" against every assault of the enemy; and his "refuge" in every storm. Never will the LORD cast off His people, though, in due time, He will cut off the wicked. (Vv. 20-23).

S. The Coming of the Lord.

The Coming of the Lord.

"He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus"Revelation 22:20. In the course of the Revelation, we are forewarned of the failure of the church in its responsibility to witness for Christ during the time of His absence: and the complete breakdown of the world in exercising government for the repression of violence and corruption.

Nevertheless, we are also instructed that, in spite of the failure of man, all the counsels of God for His glory, the exaltation of Christ, the heavenly blessing of the church, and the earthly blessing of man, will at last be fulfilled. Furthermore, we learn that all God’s counsels will be carried out through Christ, Who will deal in judgment with all the evil, and bring in all the blessing. Finally, we are again and again reminded that both the judgment and the blessing await the coming of Christ.

Having our thoughts lifted above all the failure and fixed upon Christ — the One Who is coming in judgment for the wicked, and in grace for His own — we hear the Lord’s final appeal to our hearts in the closing words of the New Testament, as He says, "SURELY, I COME QUICKLY." The contemplation of the glories of Christ, and the solemnity and blessedness of the truths presented in these great visions, together with this touching appeal, so full of hope and encouragement, will surely call forth from our hearts, as from the apostle, the glad response, "Amen, even so, come, Lord Jesus." May we then briefly review some of the great coming events foretold in the course of the Revelation in order that, we may not only hold tenaciously the truth of the Lord’s coming as a doctrine, but that it may become the longing desire of our hearts.

(1) "The faithful Witness" (Revelation 1:5-6). — In the course of the Revelation we see the entire and final breakdown of man in responsibility, during the absence of Christ. But before we learn of the failure of man, we are permitted to have, in the opening verses, a beautiful presentation of Christ in the perfection of His Person and work. The church has failed as a witness; but Christ is "The faithful Witness." The dark shadow of death is over the whole world; but Christ has broken the power of death, for He is "The first begotten from the dead." The kings of the earth have failed in government, but Christ is above all, for He is the "Prince of the kings of the earth." Moreover, Christ has fitted His people to share in His kingdom glories, and to worship as priests before His God and Father. For, as these glories of Christ are presented before us, believers can at once respond, by saying, This is the One "that loves us and has washed us from our sins in His own blood" (N.Tn.).

How blessed, for each believer, with the assurance that the word of God gives, to be able to say of the One Who is the faithful witness, Who has triumphed over the power of death, Who is above all the kings of the earth, He loves me, and has washed me from my sins in His own blood. He is so great, and we are so small, yet He loves us, and has died for us. Well, indeed, may we say, "To Him be the glory and dominion for ever and ever." But, for the judgment of all evil, the display of His glory and the manifestation of His Kingdom, we are at once directed to His coming, as we

read, "Behold He cometh" (Revelation 1:7). Faith, resting in His finished work, and looking on to the glorious result in the coming kingdom, can respond, "Amen. even so, come, Lord Jesus."

(2) The Promises to the Overcomer (Revelation 2:1-29; Revelation 3:1-22). — If the addresses to the Seven Churches give us a prophetic view of the church in its passage through time, and foretell its failure as a witness for Christ, they also encourage individual believers by indicating that, in every stage of its failing history, there will be overcomers to whom precious promises are made.

However much we may have a foretaste of the blessedness of these promises, it is clear that we must wait the day of glory to enter into their fulness. Then, indeed, we shall feed on "the Tree of Life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God," and "eat of the hidden manna." Only then will it be possible to "have power over the nations," and be "a pillar in the temple of God," and sit with Christ upon His throne. To enter into the blessing of these promises, the Lord holds out before us the hope of His coming. He can say, "Hold fast till I come" (Revelation 2:25); and again, we hear Him say, "Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." (Revelation 3:11). As the blessedness and reality of these promises rise before our souls, we shall surely respond to the Lord’s words and say, "Amen. even so, come, Lord Jesus."

(3) The opening of the Book (Revelation 5:1-14). — Passing on to the Fourth and Fifth chapters of the Revelation, we learn that John was taken in spirit into heaven, there to see a great vision of angels and saints around the throne of God. In the right hand of Him that sat upon the throne he saw a book sealed with seven seals. This book we know, from the chapters that follow, sets forth the ways of God whereby He will deal with all the evil of the world and bring in the universal blessing, through Christ, for His own glory. The opening of the book involves the fulfilment of all that is written therein. The question is raised in heaven, Who can do this? Where is there a man in heaven, or earth, or under the earth, who is able to deal in judgment with all the evil of the world — to end the long centuries of violence and corruption — and introduce the worldwide blessings of righteousness, peace, and joy, that will mark the reign of Christ? To accomplish this great work calls for one who has "worthiness" and "ability." When the question is raised: "Who is worthy?" it is at once found that "No man . . . was able to open the book," and "No man was found worthy to open the book." From time to time, in the history of the world, men have arisen who, in their vanity, have thought they could by their puny efforts end the ills of mankind and bring in a new order of universal blessing, only to discover that they have increased the misery of the world by filling it with violence and corruption.

If there is no man with the needed worthiness or power, it would seem to John that there is no ray of hope of dealing with the evil, and bringing in the blessing. Little wonder, then, that he "wept much." But if John wept much, he was not allowed to weep long; for an elder, instructed in the mind of heaven, tells him that there is no need to weep, for One is found Who "hath prevailed to open the book." At once his gaze is directed to Christ as "the Lion of the tribe of Juda." The apostle turns to gaze at the Lion, and behold, he sees "A Lamb as it had been slain." He sees Christ, as the Lion, with all power: and Christ, as the Lamb, with all worthiness. The immediate result is that all heaven is engaged with Christ, and breaks into "A new song," saying. "Thou art worthy." In this burst of praise we see the final result of the opening of the book. As we look upon the world today, we see the whole creation groaning and travailing in pain, while violence and corruption are raging

through the earth. But this great scene gives us the sure and certain hope that through the worthiness and ability of the Lamb, all the evil will be judged and universal blessing secured; and, in that great day "Every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and such as are upon the sea, and all that are in them," will join in saving. "Blessing, and honour and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever."

I cannot tell how all the lands shall worship, When at His bidding every storm is stilled, Or who shall say how great the jubilation When all the hearts of men with love are filled. But this I know, the skies will thrill with gladness, And myriad, myriad human voices sing, And earth to heaven, and heaven to earth will answer, At last the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is King.

We know that the dawn of this great day, awaits the coming of Christ, and as by faith it becomes to our souls a blessed reality about to be fulfilled, we shall surely say, "even so, come, Lord Jesus."

(4) The Avenging of the Saints. — Passing on to Revelation 18:20, and Revelation 19:5, we learn that the day is coming when heaven, with all the "saints, apostles and prophets" (N.Tn.) will be called to rejoice because God has avenged His people for all the persecutions and sufferings they have endured for Christ's sake throughout the ages.

Looking back over the centuries, we recall the sufferings of God's people from corrupt Judaism, commencing with the stoning of His servant Stephen. Passing on to the persecutions of Pagan Rome, let us remember the sufferings endured by millions of Christian martyrs abandoned to outrage and death in the most hideous forms that human wickedness could devise. Then we cannot forget that under Papal Rome how many millions of God's people have been hunted, persecuted, and massacred: given over to the horrors of the Inquisition, the tortures of the rack, and the flames of the stake. Coming to modern times, let us not forget the Armenian massacres, and the persecutions that many of God's people are enduring at this present moment at the hands of those who are throwing off all profession of God, and falling back into pagan darkness, and thus, as we are warned by the apostle Peter, behaving like the dog that returns to its vomit, and the sow to her wallowing in the mire. In all these sufferings of God's people throughout the ages, let us remember, that, though there was no direct intervention on the part of God to stop the stones being flung at His witnesses, and no miraculous power put forth to deliver from the agonies of the rack, or quench the flames at the stake, yet it will be made manifest in the coming day that God was not an indifferent spectator to the sufferings of His people nor deaf to their prayers and cries. When God avenges "the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon earth," the wickedness of men will meet with righteous judgment, and His suffering people will have their bright reward. This great intervention of God, in judgment on the wicked and in blessing for His people, will be brought to pass by the coming of the Lord. Already we have heard the witness of John, "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him" (Revelation 1:7). If His coming leads the persecutors of God's people to wail, it calls those who have been persecuted to rejoice. In response to this call, John hears "a great voice of much people in heaven, saving. Alleluia; salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God." Looking on to this great day, we may say.

"Amen. even so, come, Lord Jesus."

(5) The Marriage of the Lamb (Revelation 19:6-9). The false system that professes the name of Christ, and yet, through the ages, has persecuted His people, and corrupted Christianity, having been dealt with in judgment, the way is prepared for the great day of the marriage of the Lamb, when the Lord's true people will be presented to Himself "a glorious church not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing," but "holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:27).

We know that, in its early history, the church was "espoused as a chaste virgin to Christ." Alas! as Israel of old broke down in responsibility as the witness for Jehovah, so the church has utterly failed as a witness for Christ. In both cases the failure is traced back to loss of first love. The LORD has to say to Israel, through Jeremiah, "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, and the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after Me in the wilderness; but Be adds, "They have gone far from Me, and have walked after vanity" (Jeremiah 2:2-5). So, too, the root of all the failure of the church, as a light for Christ in the world, is exposed by the Lord's own words, "Thou hast left thy first love" (Revelation 2:4).

Nevertheless, if Israel, and the church, both fail in their love, and consequently are set aside as a light in the world, there is no failure in the love of the Lord. In spite of Israel's loss of their early love, the LORD can say, through the prophet Jeremiah, in reference to Israel, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31:3). And, today, we know that nothing in us called forth the love of Christ, and no failure on our part will alter His love. In the past, "Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it." In the present we are loved with "the love of Christ which passeth knowledge," and that is serving His people by sanctifying, and cleansing them, "with the washing of water by the word," in view of the day, so soon to come when His love will present the church to Himself "holy and without blame" (Ephesians 5:25-27). As a result of the unfailing love of Christ, Israel will be brought into the blessings of the kingdom, and the church, as the Bride, will be presented to Christ when the day of "the marriage of the Lamb is come." On that great day, all heaven will say, "Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come." To answer to the love of Christ, to keep His word, and not deny His name, in the midst of the corruptions of Christendom will cost us something. To go outside the camp, unto Him, will entail reproach, and following with the few instead of the crowd. Such a path will appear mere folly to the flesh, as in the days of old it might have appeared great folly on the part of Ruth to turn her back on her relations, her home and her country, in order to associate with an aged and desolate woman in taking a journey to an unknown people, in a land she had never seen. Nevertheless, that path, which to sight looked so weak and foolish, led to the great day of the marriage, when, in the presence of all the people, with the blessing of the people, she became the wife of Boaz, and had the honour of entering into the generation of the Lord. The believer, today, if true to Christ, must be prepared for reproach and contempt, and possibly have to face persecution and loneliness, even as Paul found himself in prison, forsaken by all men; and John exiled to the Isle of Patmos. But "it doth not yet appear what we shall be." In spite of all that looks so weak and contemptible in the eyes of men, faith can say, "We know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." When this glorious end is reached, on the great day of the marriage of the Lamb, it will be manifest that any little suffering, reproach, or insults we have had to meet in our journey heavenward, are but light afflictions compared with the eternal weight of glory to which they lead (2 Corinthians 4:17-18). For this great day, we await the fulfilment of the Lord's own words, "I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I

am, there ye may be also." As this day of coming glory rises before our souls, and we hear the Lord's last words, "Surely, I come quickly," we may well respond, "Amen. even so, come, Lord Jesus."

(6) The Eternal State (Revelation 21:1-9). In the opening verses of chapter 21 we are carried beyond time into eternity, as there is brought before faith's vision, "A new heaven and a new earth," in which there will be no more sea, as in this world, to break our hearts by separating us from our loved ones. The blessedness of the eternal state will be that God is there dwelling with men, who by the work of Christ will be "holy and without blame before Him in love" and thus suited to be "His people." The history of this present world can be summed up as one of "tears," "death," "sorrow," "crying" and "pain." As we pass through this vale of tears. God, in His infinite compassion, may meet us in our sorrows and dry our tears; but, again and again, as we pass along our way we have to meet fresh sorrows and shed more tears. But at last, in this eternal day, "God shall wipe away all tears," and "there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." In view of bringing to pass the "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness," the apostle Peter can say, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise" — the promise of His coming to bring in "the day of God." Let us then heed the apostle Peter's exhortation, when he says, "Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless" (2 Peter 3:9-14). As this glorious vision of eternal blessedness rises before our souls, and we hear the Lord say, "Surely I come quickly." may we respond, "Amen. even so, come, Lord Jesus.

(7) The Holy City, Jerusalem (Revelation 21:9-27; Revelation 22:1-5). — Already we have learnt that, though the church has failed on earth in its love for Christ, yet, owing to the unfailing love of Christ, it will, on the day of the marriage of the Lamb, be presented to Christ "holy and without blemish," for the satisfaction of His heart. "He shall see of the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied." Now we are to learn that though the church has also failed as a light for the world, it will yet be displayed before the nations for the glory of Christ in the coming Kingdom.

All that the church should have been morally, as the representative of Christ on earth, will be seen in perfection in the church in the coming day of millennial glory, as set forth in figure in this heavenly city. In our passage through time, we were left to "shine as lights" in a world of darkness, and to hold forth "the word of life" in a world of death (Php 2:13; Php 2:16). Alas! the professing church has ceased to be a light for Christ, and failed to hold forth the word of life to men. But in spite of all our failure, we can look on to the glory and in this city learn that at last the nations will walk in the light of the church in glory: and in it will be found the river of life, and the tree of life for the healing of the nations. Moreover, in the church in glory there will be nothing to dim the light, for "there shall be no night there; nor will there be any evil influence to corrupt the life, for there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie."

How good then to keep and cherish "the sayings of the prophecy of this book," while for their fulfilment we await the coming of the Lord (Revelation 22:7). As the vision of the city rises before our souls, and in faith we hear the Lord saying, "Surely I come quickly," we may well respond from our hearts, "Amen. even so, come, Lord Jesus." As we look upon the world today, we see that,

increasingly, it is marked by violence and corruption; that professing Christendom fast hastens on to apostacy, and that the true people of God are divided and scattered. But, if we keep the sayings of the prophecy of this book, there will open before us a blessed unfolding of the coming glory when at last the Lord’s blood-bought people, so long divided, will sing together for they shall see eye to eye; when every promise to the overcomers will be fulfilled when the book will be opened that leads to the united praise of heaven and earth: when all the wrongs His people have suffered through the ages will be avenged when the Lord will no longer tarry for His bride, but will present her to Himself on the great day of the marriage of the Lamb; when the church will be displayed in glory to the world as a light for Christ and healing for all their ills, and when at last there will arise a new heaven and a new earth where God will dwell with men, and "they shall be His people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God." To bring in all this blessing, again and again, we are reminded that the Lord is coming, and coining quickly. In the closing chapter we hear the Lord say, "Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book" (ver 7). Blessed indeed, to keep the sayings, but this calls forth no response from His people. Again, we hear the Lord say, "Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (verse 12). How encouraging to know that every work for the Lord, if it be only a cup of cold water given in His name, will have its reward. But, again, this calls forth no response from the saints. Finally, we hear the Lord’s voice for the third time, as He closes the volume of Scripture, by saying, "Surely I come quickly." No word is added as to the sayings or rewards: it is Himself alone that is presented to our hearts, — the One that loves us, and has washed us from our sins in His own blood. At once the hearts of His own, engaged with Himself, respond, as they say, "Amen. even so, come, Lord Jesus."

H. Smith.

S. The Disciple Whom Jesus Loved.

The Disciple Whom Jesus Loved.

Hamilton Smith.

(Extracted from Scripture Truth magazine, Volume 20, 1928, page 104.)

Every true believer loves the Lord. Peter, speaking of the Lord to believers, can say, "Whom having not seen ye love." In the presence of the proud Pharisee, the Lord can say of the woman who kissed His feet, "She loved much." Thus Scripture recognizes this love and the Lord delights in it. Moreover, love to the Lord carries with it the promise of many blessings, not the least being the special realization of the presence of the Lord and of the Father (John 14:21-24).

Yet Scripture recognizes that love to the Lord may be found in very varied measures in different disciples on different occasions. The love of Mary of Bethany, who anointed the Lord with "the very precious ointment," was surely greater than that of the indignant disciples who said, "To what purpose is this waste?" The love of Mary of Magdala, who "stood without at the sepulchre weeping," exceeded, on that occasion, the love of the disciples who "went away again to their own home."

Moreover, our love may wax and wane. Under pressure the love of many may "wax cold." In the presence of the allurements of the world, this love may become dim, as in the case of a believer of whom the Apostle Paul can say, he "hath forsaken me, having loved this present world."

Thus while love to the Lord is very precious in His sight and to be cherished and desired by the believer, yet, it is clear, we cannot trust in a love that is so liable to change. The love that we alone can rest in must be the love that knows no change — the love that abides - the love of Christ for His own.

"Our souls thro’ many changes go: His love no change can ever know."

It is the realization and enjoyment of the love of Christ that awakens our love to Him. "We love Him," says the apostle, "because He first loved us." Hence our love to Christ will be according to the measure in which we realize His love to us. Would we then love the Lord with more singleness of heart, let us not turn in upon our own hearts and think of our love to Him, but seek to delight our souls in His love to us. The effect of the soul thus delighting itself in the love of Christ is blessedly set forth in connection with the Apostle John, in the closing scenes of the Lord’s life. While, in contrast, the same scenes depict the sorrowful effects of confidence in our love to the Lord, in the case of the Apostle Peter. Both disciples loved the Lord with a true and deep affection beyond that of most, for it led them to leave all and follow Him. One disciple; however, trusted in his love to the Lord, while the other rested in the Lord’s love to him. This is the outstanding difference between these two men, so often found in close association in these last scenes. When the Lord, in His wonderful grace, washes the disciples’ feet, Peter can ask, "Lord, dost Thou wash my feet?" And when he learns that without the feet-washing there can be no part with Christ, immediately he

exclaims with a glow of ardent love, "Not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." A little later, with genuine love to the Lord, he can say, "I am ready to go with Thee, both into prison and to death": and again, "Though all men shall be offended because of Thee, yet will I never be offended." Then at the betrayal scene, Peter, in his ardent love for the Lord, drew his sword in defence of his Master. Thus, both by words and deeds, he seems to say, "I am the man that loves the Lord." In contrast to Peter, the Apostle John says, as it were, "I am the man that the Lord loves," for five times, in these last scenes, he describes himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." Blessed, indeed, that His love should have so wrought with us that we should love Him, but far more wonderful that He should love us. In this wonderful love John delighted, and on this boundless love he rested. THE UPPER ROOM.

John 13:21-25. The first occasion on which John is called "the disciple whom Jesus loved" is in the Upper Room, as described in John 13:1-38. What a scene it is for the heart to contemplate! Jesus is there with a love that can never break down, for "having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." John is there delighting himself in the love of Christ, resting his head on the bosom of Jesus, and describing himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved. Peter is there with real and ardent love for the Lord, but trusting in his own love to the Lord rather than resting in the Lord’s love to him. Lastly, Judas is there, with no love to the Lord — with the bag at his side and the devil in his heart, ready to betray the Lord and pass into the long dark night. In Jesus we see how very near His love has brought Him to men like ourselves, inasmuch as John can rest his head on the bosom of the One who dwelt in the bosom of the Father. In John we see what the heart of the Saviour can do for a sinner, bringing him to perfect rest in perfect love. In Judas we see what the heart of the sinner can do with the Saviour — betray Him, with every profession of love, for thirty pieces of silver. The feet washing is over and the time has come for the Lord to utter His farewell words; but for the moment His spirit is troubled by the presence of the betrayer. The Lord unburdens His heart to His disciples, saying, "One of you shall betray Me." Immediately the disciples look one on another, doubting of whom He spake. Looking one on another will never solve difficulties that arise amongst believers. We must look to the Lord, but looking to the Lord demands nearness to the Lord, and in the circle of the Upper Room, the disciple who was nearest to the Lord, was the one whose feet had been in the hands of the Lord, whose head was resting on the bosom of the Lord, and whose heart was delighting in the love of the Lord, who can describe himself as "one of His disciples whom Jesus loved." Peter, the man who was trusting in his love to the Lord, was not near enough to the Lord to learn His mind, he must needs beckon to John.

Thus we learn that nearness to the Lord and intimacy with the Lord, is the happy portion of the one who is resting upon the Lord’s love. THE CROSS.

John 19:25-27. The second occasion on which John is described as the disciple whom Jesus loved, brings us to the cross. The mother of Jesus is present with other devoted women, and one disciple is there — the disciple whom Jesus loved. Where is now the disciple that rested in his love to Christ? Alas, away in some lonely spot with a broken heart, weeping tears of bitter shame. Where is the disciple who rests in the love of Christ? As at the Upper Room, so now at the cross, as near to Christ as he can be. And what is the result? He becomes a vessel fit and meet for the Master’s use. The mother of Jesus is committed to his care. Resting in the Lord’s love fits for service. THE RESURRECTION.

John 20:1-4. For the third time, John is presented as the disciple whom Jesus loved on the resurrection morning, and again is found in association with Peter. The two disciples, learning from the women that the sepulchre is empty, hasten to the tomb. Then follows the record of what might appear to be insignificant detail, namely that Peter starts first, that both disciples run together, and finally that the disciple whom Jesus loved did outrun Peter. Nothing that the Spirit of God has recorded can be unimportant, though, as in this case, it may be difficult to seize the import of a particular incident. Yet, if we may be allowed to spiritualize this scene, we may learn, what is surely true, that while the man of ardent nature may often take the lead in some spiritual enterprise, it is the man who is leaning on the love of the Lord that finally takes the lead. THE SEA OF TIBERIAS.

John 21:1-7. In this instructive scene Peter and John again have a prominent place, and for the fourth time John is referred to as the disciple whom Jesus loved (verse 7). As usual the energetic and impulsive Peter takes the lead. He goes back to his old occupation. He does not ask others to do so, but simply says, "I go a fishing." However, under the influence of his dominating personality, "They say unto him, we also go with thee." They went forth, therefore, and toiled all night, and for their pains caught nothing. When the morning came, "Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus." Having by a question shown them the uselessness of efforts put forth without His direction, He proceeds to show how rich the results when acting under His control. Immediately the disciple whom Jesus loved perceives, "It is the Lord." The one who is trusting in the Lord’s love is the one who has quick spiritual perception.

"WHEN THEY HAD DINED."

John 21:15-22.

Following upon the scene at the lake side, the disciples find when they come to land, a fire of coals, fish laid thereon and bread, and an invitation to come and dine. Rich provision had been made for their needs, apart from all their efforts. When they had dined we have the closing scene in which again Peter and John have a special place, and for the fifth time John is described as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (verse 20). First we have the Lord’s tender dealings with the man that trusted in his own love. Peter, who had said he was ready to go with the Lord to prison and death, had found that he was not ready to stand before the simple question of a serving maid. But of the actual denial, no word is said in this touching scene. The solemn breakdown had been dealt with between the Lord and His servant in an interview with which no stranger shall intermeddle. All we know of that interview is the statement of the Eleven, "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon," confirmed long after by the Apostle Paul, when he wrote to the Corinthians that the risen Christ "was seen of Cephas then of the twelve.’’ Wonderful love that with tender mercy gave the first interview to the most failing disciple.

If, however, in the first interview his conscience was relieved, in this scene his heart is restored. There the Lord had dealt with the outward failure, here He deals with the inward root that caused the failure. The root was confidence in his love to Christ, and the threefold question thoroughly exposes this root. It is as if the Lord said, "After all that has happened, do you still maintain, Peter, that you love Me more than these?" With the second question, the Lord says nothing of the other disciples: it is simply now, "Lovest thou Me?" With the third question, the Lord, using a different word, asks, "Art thou attached to Me?" (N. Tr.). By his third answer Peter puts himself entirely into

the Lord’s hands, saying, " Lord, thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I am attached to Thee." It is as if Peter said, "I cannot trust my love, or talk of my love, or what I will do, but Lord, You know all things, and You know my heart, I will leave You to estimate my love, and tell me what to do." No longer is Peter telling the Lord in self-confidence what he is ready to do, but it is the Lord, in infinite grace, telling his restored disciple what He will enable him to do. The Lord as it were, says, "You no longer trust in your love to do great things for Me, you have left it to Me; then go forth and "Feed My sheep" (verse 17), "Glorify God" (verse 19), and "Follow Me" (verse 19). The Lord seems to say, "Time was when you thought you loved Me more than these other disciples, now go forth and show your love by feeding my sheep that I love. You thought to glorify yourself above others by prison and death, now go forth to prison and death to glorify God, and when all is over down here, still follow Me far into the depths of glory where I am going." May we not say that not the least wonderful of all the wonders of the Lord’s life, is the way He takes with a failing disciple? But what of John? "Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following." The man who trusted in his own love and had broken down, needed restoring grace, and the exhortation, "Follow Me." Not so the man who was resting in the love of the Lord, for he was "following."

Thus, in the disciple whom Jesus loved, we see set forth the blessed results that follow for those who rest in the love of the Lord; such Dwell in nearness to, and intimacy with, the Lord; Are ready to be used in the service of the Lord; Will make spiritual progress; Will have spiritual discernment ; and Will follow close to the Lord. May it be our happy portion, like the bride of the Song, to say, "I am my Beloved’s, and His desire is toward me." If we can say little of our love to Him, we can safely boast of His love to us. It is the privilege of the youngest believer to say, "I am a disciple that Jesus loves," and the oldest and most advanced disciple can say nothing greater, for all blessing is found in His all-embracing love, that led Him to die for us that we too might go forth, in our small way, and feed His sheep, glorify God, and follow Him into the glory where He has gone.

S. The Facts Restated

The Facts Restated A criticism of recent pamphlets defending the principles of Open Brethren — 1930. By Hamilton Smith.

Note. The following letter was written in reply to a communication from a brother in the Open Brethren Fellowship, enquiring if I had issued an answer to Mr. W. Hoste's pamphlet, "Re-judging the Question," and Mr. H. P. Barker's pamphlet, "Why I abandoned Exclusivism."

It is now printed, not for the sake of fighting opponents, but, in the hope that it may help to steady any who, through lack of knowledge of the facts, may be shaken in their convictions by misleading statements in the above papers. At this late date comparatively few possess the documents necessary in order to obtain the facts relating to the 1848 division. I have therefore sought to record, in an orderly way, the events that led to this sad division. I may, however, mention, for the sake of those who have it in their power to verify the facts, that these facts have been mainly drawn from the following Books and Pamphlets:- 1. The Letter of the Ten. 1848.

2. The Whole Case of Plymouth and Bethesda. W. Trotter. 1849.

3. A Letter on Bethesda Fellowship. J. S. Oliphant. 1865.

4. Darbyism. H. Groves. 1866.

5. History of the Plymouth Brethren. W. B. Neatby. 1901.

6. The Doctrine of Christ and Bethesdaism. W. Kelly. 1906.

7. Bethesda Fellowship. J. S. Oliphant. 1907. In citing this list it may be well to add that I do not agree with all the opinions expressed in some of these papers, but, it is felt they can be trusted for the bare facts.

One has written to me as follows: — "There are many who do not want to be convinced; and I suppose with deep sorrow of heart that we may have to lose such, in the way of their secession from what we humbly believe to be the Lord's path for faithful souls in the maintenance of the truth of Christ and the Church. The difficulty is great when those are found among us who have not the candour to adopt the uniform and join the ranks of those who are Open Brethren out and out: but claim the liberty to associate with us in 'fellowship' (sic) and profess to make a stand for the truth while daily undermining it. They seem to see no inconsistency in it; yet whenever there is an occasion to press the principles of Divine order and discipline in the assembly, they are active at once in opposing themselves. Open Brethren have at least the honesty of their convictions, and can be usually met as honest men, even if wrong; but it is difficult to avoid very, very strong feelings about those who use their inside privileges among us to belittle and counteract the principles which have given us the path we tread."

I feel the solemn truth of this extract. Apparently the great effort of the enemy is to rob us of the truth by misstating the facts, misrepresenting the principles, and emphasizing details of mistakes

made by individuals in difficult cases, and thus lead us to abandon the path of separation in which alone the full truth can be maintained and enjoyed. One can only trust that the following letter may help those who have to meet this specious form of opposition to the truth.

H.S.

Elmswood,

Montpelier, Weston-Super-Mare.

November 25th, 1930.

Dear Brother, Your letter to hand with enclosures, for which accept my thanks. You ask me for my thoughts on the papers by Mr. H. P. Barker and Mr. Hoste, so I will venture to give you my convictions for what they are worth. As to Mr. Barker's paper I am not surprised that you read it "with astonishment and regret." Many others share these feelings with you. I judge you refer to his paper "Why I abandoned Exclusivism." He has, however, written an article in the Open Brethren magazine "The Witness," entitled, "Supposing Exclusivism were Right." May I briefly refer to both?

First, as to the article, "Supposing Exclusivism were Right." There is that about this paper which might well lead one to say, "It carries its own condemnation, and therefore calls for no answer." However, Mr. H. Pickering evidently approved the paper and thought it worthy of publication, and, having given it wide publicity in the pages of "The Witness," it calls for some comment. The object of this paper is apparently to prove that the principles held by the Exclusive brethren are wrong and, in practice, lead to absurd situations. Mr. Barker has not attempted to show exclusive principles are wrong, or that the open principles are right, by bringing before us statements of Scripture. He has chosen another way, and sought to condemn what he calls exclusivism by supposing a case which, he considers, makes it look ridiculous and impossible. In a word he has chosen the dangerous expedient of opposing what he considers wrong by ridicule. For the Christian ridicule is a dangerous weapon, and he who resorts to it may find himself in strange company, for it has been ever the favourite weapon with the infidel who sets himself to oppose Christianity. In Matthew 22:23-33, the infidel Sadducees come to the Lord attempting to prove the impossibility of the resurrection by supposing a case which, they imagined, made resurrection absurd. They did not attempt to prove it false by Scripture, but they opposed it by ridicule. In the same manner Mr. Barker supposes a scene at Philippi in which the Assembly refuses to receive Trophimus because he comes from the Assembly at Ephesus, where Mr. Barker supposes there are those who teach error concerning the resurrection.

Further he supposes that Trophimus is told that he can go and sit outside by an immoral man. This latter supposition has nothing to do with the principles that Mr. Barker is opposing, and would seem to be merely added as a gratuitous insult to Exclusive Brethren, and shows to what depths we can sink when we want to disparage one another. When I turn to Scripture I find not a line to say that those who taught this false doctrine, as to the resurrection, were in the Assembly at Ephesus. The Scripture implies exactly the contrary, for we read that Hymenaeus had been delivered to Satan by the Apostle to learn not to blaspheme. Are we then to imagine that a blasphemer, and one committed to Satan, was still in the Assembly?

However, Mr. Barker does imagine that in the Assembly at Ephesus there was a man of whom Scripture speaks as a blasphemer, who was delivered to Satan, who taught fundamental error, whose word worked like a gangrene, and who overthrew the faith of some. Then, having supposed this man to be in the Assembly at Ephesus, Mr. Barker proceeds to condemn the Assembly at Philippi for refusing to receive those who came from Ephesus. For, be it remembered, the whole point of his paper is to pour ridicule on what he supposes took place at Philippi. The only conclusion we can come to is that Mr. Barker thinks it right to receive from a meeting in which there is a blasphemer who teaches fundamentally false doctrine — though, I presume, he would add, provided the person coming from the meeting has not imbibed the error and protests against the blasphemer.

Mr. Barker has indeed gone far from what he professed to hold in 1922, when he wrote, "As to Bethesda principles — by which I presume you mean the reception of persons, themselves sound in the faith, who maintain a link with a meeting where heretical teaching is tolerated — I am as far from them as ever. I would be no party to the reception of such persons." What he was far from in 1922 he now, in 1930, ridicules if not done.

Mr. Barker, in his paper, re-asserts the principle of the Letter of the Ten with this difference that, whereas the Ten set forth this principle in the sober language that becomes divine things, Mr. Barker has done so with a levity that many of us judge to be little short of profanity.

We come now to Mr. Barker's second paper, "Why I abandoned Exclusivism" with appended notes by H. St. John. In this paper after, not very happily, dismissing the pamphlets written by those who oppose his views, as being "More or less a hash-up of the usual misrepresentations," he proceeds to give us his own views and experiences.

Instead, however, of facing, in a sober spirit, the differences that separate Exclusive Brethren from Open Brethren, he repeats foolish things that have been said; isolated incidents that have occurred; dwells upon divisions, and falls back upon ancient history.

What, however, is all this but evasion of the real issue? After all, we are not separate because of foolish things that have been said on either side, nor because of isolated incidents that have occurred on either side, nor because of divisions on either side, nor simply because of what took place in 1848.

Today the Exclusive Brethren are in separation from Open Brethren for two main reasons. First, because of certain principles maintained or acted upon, by the Open Brethren which Exclusive Brethren believe to be unscriptural and destructive of the Church in its practical administration. Second, because of the condition — loss of much truth and worship (which Mr. Barker admits), adoption of worldly methods in service, etc., — which has been the outcome of the adoption and practice of these principles. This issue Mr. Barker almost entirely evades, and contents himself with repeating things which, even if true, have no bearing on the issue, and appear to have been repeated with the deliberate purpose of attempting to raise prejudice against Exclusive Brethren.

I am surprised to read the remarks by H. St. John. My acquaintance with him is of the slightest, but it was sufficient to lead me to expect something different from his pen.

Others, beside Mr. Barker, have changed their fellowship from Open Brethren to Exclusive Brethren or vice versa, and altered their views, but almost without exception, a right Christian feeling has led such to do so without causing trouble, or saying things that would hurt the feelings of those they have left. Mr. Barker is a sorrowful exception.

While still professing to be with Exclusive Brethren, he advocated principles and adopted practices (such as breaking bread and preaching in Open Brethren Meetings) which he knew troubled the consciences of his brethren, and brought confusion into Meetings. At that time (1923) appeal after appeal was made to him; it being pointed out that his only righteous course was either to cease doing things that ignored the consciences of others, or else withdraw. Alas! every appeal was in vain, and as a result he found that the Meetings of the Exclusive Brethren were shut to him.

Thus by force of circumstances, rather than any principle on his part, I fear, Mr. Barker found himself with the Open Brethren. And, the Meetings of Exclusive Brethren being closed to him, he writes a paper to tell us why he abandoned Exclusivism. Moreover he has used his Missionary Circular, his Magazine — "Marching Orders" "The Witness" — the Open Brethren's monthly, and this last pamphlet — "Why I abandoned Exclusivism" to belittle, and hold up to ridicule, those with whom he walked for thirty or forty years, from whom he learned what truth he possesses, whose hospitality he accepted, and to whom he was so largely beholden for the meeting of his temporal needs.

If it was only a matter of changing his fellowship, and changing his views, however much we might regret it, nothing could be said. In such matters each must act before the Lord. The way, however, in which he has made this change appears to me to be unworthy of a Christian and, I feel, must be condemned by every spiritually minded person whether amongst "Open" or "Exclusive" Brethren. He could, as others have done, have changed his fellowship, and gone on with his work without hurting anyone's conscience.

I am sure, in the light of Scripture, that those who take a course in which they act in defiance of the consciences of their brethren, enter upon a perilous path. Have you noticed the solemn stages of this road as marked out by the Apostle in The First Epistle to the Corinthians? In Chapter 8, he warns the Corinthian saints against wounding the consciences of their brethren. In chapter 10, the warning becomes more solemn, for he reminds them that it is possible to "provoke the Lord to jealousy." In chapter 11, the final stage is reached, when we read, "Many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." To provoke the saints is serious, to provoke the Lord may be fatal, as far as this life is concerned. The Lord is very tender, and long-suffering with us, or where would any of us be, but let us take heed lest we provoke the Lord to jealousy.

What makes the course that Mr. Barker has taken all the more sad, is the fact of his undoubted zeal and usefulness in his own particular line of service. I am sure God will not be unrighteous to forget his work and labour of love, and I do not want to forget it, nor the happy times we spent together in little bits of service in the past. None the less, I am not prepared to let past friendships hinder me from raising my voice on behalf of those he has deeply wronged and whom I deeply love. Doubtless the Exclusive Brethren, like the Open Brethren, and all others, have broken down most grievously, and, in one sense, deserve all the stones that will be thrown at them. Nevertheless I am sorry for the man that throws the stones, and more especially when that man has received more than usual kindness from their hands.

Coming now to Mr. Hoste's paper, "Rejudging the Question," the greater part of it, as the title would suggest, is taken up with an appeal to history. In the main he bases his defence of the Open Brethren system on history which he maintains has been misrepresented by Exclusive Brethren. In the presence of this charge it may be well to review the facts.

We all know the difficulty of obtaining the exact details of events that take place today. This difficulty must be greatly increased in regard to events that occurred over eighty years ago. Mr. Hoste evidently recognises this, for he admits the use, in such a case, of the "principle of probability." There is, however, in existence ample documentary evidence to enable us to arrive at a definite conclusion on the main facts, which can be strengthened by keeping "probability in view" as Mr. Hoste suggests.

All admit that the division was brought to a head through the circumstances under which certain individuals, who came from Mr. Newton's Meeting at Plymouth, were received by the Bethesda Meeting at Bristol. From the somewhat disconnected way in which Mr. Hoste refers to this history, it would be difficult for anyone to glean from his paper exactly what took place. But the conclusion he arrives at is quite definite. He says, of these persons who were received, that they "were one and all candidates for permanent fellowship, and it was in no way contemplated that they should ever return to break bread at Plymouth." This plainly means that Mr. Hoste contends that Bethesda viewed these people as having severed their ties with Mr. Newton and his meeting.

Here then is a plain issue. Do the facts and probabilities support this conclusion? The evidence shows that in FEBRUARY 1847 it came to light that Mr. B. W. Newton, of Plymouth, was propounding views concerning the Person of Christ of such a character as to dishonour the Lord, and undermine the foundations of Christianity. When it became clear that Mr. Newton maintained his errors, many left his Meeting at Ebrington Street, Plymouth, in DECEMBER 1847. In APRIL 1848, four persons from Compton Street, Plymouth (the Meeting in fellowship with Mr. Newton at Ebrington Street, had moved to Compton Street) applied for fellowship at Bethesda, Bristol; namely, Col. Woodfall and his brother, a Mrs. Brown and a Miss Hill. On MAY 10th, 1848, a meeting was held at Bath, attended by over One Hundred brothers from all parts, at which the errors of Mr. Newton were examined, and confessed and renounced by some who had been in association with him at Plymouth.

Soon after this meeting at Bath, in JUNE 1848, the above four applicants from Plymouth were received by Bethesda at Bristol.

Mr. Trotter, writing in 1849, describes these persons as "Mr. Newton's devoted friends and partizans." Lord Congleton, according to Mr. Hoste, describes them as "Four persons known as friends of Mr. Newton: and as disallowing that he held the doctrines laid to his charge." Mr. Neatby, in his book on these events, speaks of Col. Woodfall, and his brother, as being "Well-known friends of Newton's" who "had been in the habit of communicating at Bethesda Chapel whenever they passed a Sunday at Bristol." Further it is reported that they circulated the tracts which contained Mr. Newton's anti-christian doctrines.

Mr. George Alexander, in fellowship at Bethesda, besought the Bethesda Meeting to examine the charges of error against Mr. Newton before receiving these four applicants. Others, outside the Meeting, warned them of the character, and views, of the persons they were proposing to receive.

In spite of all warnings Bethesda persisted in its course, and received these persons from Plymouth, while refusing to make any investigation as to whether the charges made against their avowed friend, Mr. Newton, were true. May I pause here, in the history of these events, to make some remarks on this reception. Mr. Hoste's conclusion, drawn from his reading of these events, and what he considers probable, is that these four persons "were one and all candidates for permanent fellowship, and it was in no way contemplated that they should ever return to break bread at Plymouth," and further "were all required to give proof as to their soundness in the faith."

I judge that such a conclusion might be true in terms, as far as it goes, and yet give a totally wrong presentation of the actual case. It may be true that these people had permanently left Plymouth as a place of residence, and when tested by the general truths of Christianity found to be sound in the faith. But the question still remains, had they cleared themselves from association with the one who taught error of a deadly character, and who was the cause of all the trouble? Did not the fact of four known friends of Mr. Newton coming from his meeting and applying for reception at Bethesda make two things incumbent upon Bethesda; first, to enquire if Mr. Newton was guilty of holding the specific errors charged against him; and secondly, if found guilty, to assure themselves that these four persons had severed their connection with Mr. Newton? Is it not notorious that at the time these persons were received, Bethesda persistently declined to examine these errors or take any steps to discover if Mr. Newton was guilty of holding and propounding these alleged errors? Do not the facts clearly show that before the date of the reception of these persons, the errors of Mr. Newton had been exposed: that numbers had left his meeting in consequence of these errors; that a meeting had been held at Bath at which these errors had been confessed and renounced: and that warnings and appeals had been made from within the Bethesda meeting and without?

Yet knowing these things — as Bethesda must have done, for these things were not done in a corner — and in spite of warnings and appeals, they deliberately received the avowed friends of Mr. Newton without any investigation of the charges made against him. Those whom they received, on Mr. Hoste's showing disallowed that Mr. Newton held the doctrines laid to his charge: while those who received them declined to make any investigation as to whether the charges against Mr. Newton were true or not. In the face of these facts we are asked to believe by Mr. Hoste that they were received as those who had permanently severed their connection with Plymouth, as he says, "It was in no way contemplated that they should ever return to break bread at Plymouth."

We may well ask, Why should they decide not to return if they refused to admit that Mr. Newton held error? And why should Bethesda object to their returning if Bethesda refused to investigate the charges against Mr. Newton, or pass any judgment as to his guilt?

I submit that the facts are entirely opposed to Mr. Hoste's conclusion, and that the probabilities make his way of reading history so highly improbable that it becomes impossible to accept his conclusion. I judge both facts and probabilities clearly show that the charges made against Bethesda by leading brethren at the time of the events, and believed ever since by Exclusive Brethren, are alas true; namely, that Bethesda deliberately received persons coming from a meeting in fellowship with one who was charged with blasphemy, knowing that these persons were the friends and partizans of the one charged with blasphemy, and that these persons had not

separated, and had no intention of separating from this blasphemer. The after history, which we may now briefly resume, will only further confirm this conclusion. As the result of Bethesda's action many, who had protested, left the meeting (Mr. Darby says 30 or 40: Mr. J. S. Oliphant 50). Mr. Hoste says it is, very improbable that they left for this reason. We may well ask, Why then did they leave? Are we to imagine that 30 or 40 persons left the meeting because four persons were received who had permanently cleared themselves from Mr. Newton and his Meeting? This is too highly improbable to be believed.

Following upon the reception of these four persons in July 1848 a letter was written and signed by the ten leading brothers at Bethesda. In this letter the Ten disclaim holding the evil doctrine imputed to Mr. Newton, while definitely declining to find out if Mr. Newton held those views. That is to say the examination that was the main thing necessary — seeing they were receiving people coming from his meeting — they refused to make. For their refusal to investigate these charges against Mr. Newton they offer sundry excuses. Such for instance as the "variableness" of the views held by Mr. Newton; the fact of there being a difference among brethren as to the amount of error contained in his tracts. the ambiguous style in which they were written; the lack of leisure time to investigate, and the little probability of the Bethesda brethren coming to a unanimous judgment if they did investigate. These excuses appear very paltry, when we consider that the errors in question were touching the Person of Christ, and so far justify the charge of indifference to the glory of Christ brought against Bethesda. The final reason given for making no investigation is that such investigation was absolutely unnecessary for they had all agreed, that, "touching the amount of positive error therein contained this would not have guided us in our decision respecting an individual coming from Plymouth. For supposing the author of the tracts were fundamentally heretical, this would not warrant us in rejecting those who came from under his teaching, until we were satisfied that they had understood and imbibed views essentially subversive of foundation truth." This letter was read and adopted by the Bethesda Meeting on JULY 3rd, 1848. Thus it came to pass there were (1) a few who supported Mr. Newton at Compton Street, Plymouth: (2) there were a large number of Brethren at Plymouth and elsewhere who judged his views to be blasphemous and refused to be associated with him: (3) there were those at Bethesda who took up a neutral position between those who supported and those who separated from Mr. Newton. Mr. Craig; a leader at Bethesda, acknowledged that the meeting had taken a neutral position for he wrote, "According to the light I have, both parties are so far wrong that I have no wish to be identified with either," and again he writes, "Since we have been separated from both parties (i.e. Mr. Newton's and Mr. Darby's) there has been much quietness amongst us, etc." Seeing that these errors had reference to that which touched the Person of Christ, it was felt that this neutrality was really indifference to the glory of Christ.

Between NOVEMBER and DECEMBER 1848, about five months after the letter of The Ten was presented to Bethesda, the investigation of Mr. Newton's errors which had hitherto been refused, was undertaken by Bethesda. The reason for making this investigation is not very apparent. Mr. Neatby says "Bethesda found the pressure too strong." It is not however, very clear what the pressure was. Probably it was, as Mr. Groves suggests, to clear themselves from the charge of indifference to the honour of Christ. The result of this examination was that Bethesda condemned Mr. Newton's views and arrived at the following conclusion: — "That no one defending, maintaining, or upholding Mr. Newton's views or tracts should be received into communion." It will

be noticed there is not a word in this resolution "about excluding the friends of a false teacher or those in fellowship with him. The reception of such persons is not barred at all so long as they do not defend, maintain, or uphold Mr. Newton’s doctrine." (J.S.O.)

About the end of JANUARY 1849, Col. Woodfall went to Mr. Newton’s old congregation at Compton Street, Plymouth, and took the communion there. As to the result of this judgment, Mr. J. S. Oliphant writes as follows, "By the 12th of July 1849 ’Mr. N’s. friends’ had sent in their resignation. That this step was the result of the judgment is most questionable; at least it had no effect on some of them till two months after it had been passed; and the Messrs. W. stated, ’This step of ours has been finally determined on from a conversation with one of your pastors, who seems to think it would relieve them of some of their difficulties.’ Still they said they could not deny Mr. N. the right hand of fellowship; and the true character of the persons received by Bethesda in JUNE, 1848, is plainly declared by themselves."

I submit that the consideration of the events after the reception of the four, make it still further impossible to accept Mr. Hoste’s conclusion. The letter of The Ten clearly shows that not only Bethesda took no steps to see that the four they received were clear from association with Mr. Newton, but they saw no necessity for doing so.

Finally the conclusion they reached, when they do at length find Mr. Newton guilty, shows that they do not see the necessity of excluding a person coming from his meeting, if clear of his errors. The fact that Col. Woodfall returned to break bread at Compton Street, Plymouth in January 1849, and that both he and his brother left Bethesda, when it owned that Mr. Newton was guilty, proved clearly, whatever their motive might have been, that they had no intention of severing their links with Mr. Newton. From beginning to end of this sad history I judge that the facts and probabilities are, on the one hand, entirely opposed to Mr. Hoste’s conclusion, and, on the other, entirely confirm the conclusion reached at the time, and held ever since by Exclusive Brethren, namely, that Bethesda did, as a matter of fact, receive persons who were still in association with one holding blasphemous views as to the Person of Christ; and having received them they sought to justify their act by "The Letter of the Ten," and their subsequent resolution when they had found Mr. Newton guilty. This I believe is the history of the events that led to this division. Having reviewed the history may I again repeat that while the division was brought about by events that took place in 1848, and that doubtless principles held and practised by the Open Brethren have their roots in the past, yet, the main reasons for so-called Exclusive Brethren maintaining separation from the Open Brethren system, is not simply because of what took place in 1848, but because of principles held, and practised, in this system at the present day. As to these present-day principles, Mr. Hoste seeks to deny the charges of "Independency" and "Open Reception," brought against the Open Brethren system. In seeking to meet the charge of "Independency" (pages 5-9) Mr. Hoste draws a very exaggerated, and therefore untrue, picture of what Exclusive Brethren hold; he passes over the plain instructions of 1 Corinthians, and draws entirely wrong conclusions from the Addresses to the Seven Churches, through failing to see that these Addresses were not written to instruct the Assemblies in Church order, — already given to them in 1 Corinthians, — but to give them the Lord’s judgment as to how far they had departed from these instructions.

Moreover, Mr. Hoste does not make it very clear what the Open Brethren do hold. I may however remind you that another Open Brother, Mr. G. H. Lang, in his recent paper, "The Local Assembly," very definitely lays down what the Open Brethren hold as to the Independency of Meetings. He says, "Open Brethren hold that the Lord intends each assembly to stand and to act for itself, according to His Word, directly responsible to Himself: having to deal only with individuals presenting themselves for communion; neither responsible for nor bound by the church action of another assembly, but testing this by the Word when an individual therefrom presents himself otherwise leaving it alone." This statement, while presenting a good deal of partial truth, I entirely reject as being according to the teaching of 1 Corinthians. If it accurately represents the principles of Open Brethren, I judge, the charge of independency of meetings must remain against the Open Brethren system. It may be only fair to add that I have heard a hint that Open Brethren do not agree with Mr. Lang's paper. This may be, and I hope is so as to much that is in this paper, but I should judge the above statement fairly sets forth what Mr. Hoste, and Open Brethren generally hold as to independency of meetings. At any rate it shows that the principle of independency of meetings is amongst the Open Brethren either to be defended or opposed. As to Mr. Hoste's statement that "Open reception" "is more imaginary than real." I can only remind you that you, yourself, told me of an Open Meeting at which you were present where, at the commencement of the meeting, a leading brother publicly announced that all Christians present would be welcome to break bread. Another leading Open Brother told me that he himself had invited all Christians present to join in taking the Lord's Supper. Moreover the details are so well known of strangers being invited to break bread that, I fear, the 'open reception' is something more than a 'bogey' as Mr. Hoste suggests.

I am sorry that Mr. Hoste has revived the charges made against Mr. Darby of teaching Newtonianism, or what could not be distinguished from it. It is not quite clear whether Mr. Hoste believes these charges himself, but, as he speaks with evident approval of those who separated from Mr. Darby on account of these charges" I can only imagine that he has accepted them as true. If so I can only think that he has done so without examining the papers on the subject. If, however, any seriously wish to know what Mr. Darby really held, and wherein his views differed from Mr. Newton's blasphemous teaching, let them read the Introduction to the Second Edition of Mr. Darby's article on the Sufferings of Christ. It can be found in Vol. 7 of the Collected Writings of J.N.D. Also it would be well to read the Appendix of this paper. A perusal of these pages should definitely settle the matter for any intelligent mind, free from bias. If, however, Mr. Hoste wishes us to understand that it is the judgment of Open Brethren that Mr. Darby taught blasphemous views like those of Mr. Newton, then, I can only say, he has furnished an additional reason for very many of us declining to be linked up with the Open Brethren system.

I confess that the perusal of these different papers only strengthens me in the conviction that the Exclusive Brethren are right in refusing to be drawn into inter-communion with the Open Brethren system. At the same time I have no wish to attack Open Brethren. I must also wholly dissociate myself from the views of Mr. Hoste, as set forth on the first page of his paper. There he commends those who have made trouble in some Exclusive Meetings by persisting in going "in and out" amongst Open Meetings. Mr. Hoste is thankful that wherever this has been done "disintegration has taken place," for he evidently judges that the time has come to "break down." Doubtless he means the walls. I ask, however, what is the use of breaking down the walls if you disintegrate the

house inside? It may be of course with any body of Christians, as with Israel of old, that a time may come when God sees such a low condition that He will no longer tolerate it, and allows it to break up. But woe betide the instrument used of God to do the breaking up. I would rather not be that man. Can it possibly be following righteousness, faith, love, peace, to remain in a house, accept its hospitality and, at the same time, act in a way that disintegrates the household? If Mr. Hoste's sentiments rightly express the attitude of the Open Brethren towards those known as Exclusives, they cannot be surprised if Exclusive Brethren firmly decline to receive those coming from Open Brethren. No one can blame people for declining to receive into their houses those who avowedly rejoice in the disintegration of the household. As I am writing to one still in association with the Open Brethren may I add that, as far as I am concerned, I have, on the one hand no wish to attack or disintegrate Open Brethren meetings; on the other hand I do not desire to exalt Exclusive Brethren as against Open Brethren. I do not believe that any body of Brethren, so-called, form any exception to the general course of the break down of man in responsibility. I recognise that all have broken down, and that every principle, however Scriptural, can be, and has been abused, and that our only hope is to own our failure and cast ourselves upon the Lord. We may well take up the language of the godly remnant in Israel and say, "We are become a reproach to our neighbours, a scorn and a derision to them that are round about us" (Psalms 79:4). And again we can say, as in that same Psalm, "We are brought very low" (verse 8); and even say we "are appointed to die" (verse 11). But taking this place shall we not find the "greatness of the Lord's power" to "preserve those appointed to die." There to discover that in spite of all failure we are His sheep, and He is the Shepherd (verse 13, Psalms 80:1).

However, while owning failure I cannot admit that any amount of failure would justify us in surrendering divine principles, and hence feeling as I do in regard to the Open Brethren system, I am not prepared for inter-communion with that system, whatever fellowship I may be able to enjoy with individuals apart from their system.

Exclusivism, or that which the word rightly stands for, namely separation from iniquity and vessels to dishonour, I believe to be a great truth of Scripture, and the first step in the path that God has marked out for His people in the midst of the ruin of these last days. It stands in contrast to the "looseness," "indifference," and "independence" that the self-will of our flesh so dearly loves. Like every other principle of God, it can be, and has been, greatly abused. None the less I believe we owe the great recovery of truth in this last century to the maintenance of this principle. And only as this principle is rightly maintained will these truths be retained; while the abandonment of this principle is invariably followed by the loss of truth and the absence of worship in its true character. The late J. B. Stoney said, speaking of separation from evil, "In every age of the Church any little effort to obey this injunction has had its reward, whether observed by one or more; and whoever will take the trouble to investigate the course of any distinguished servant of the Lord, or company of believers, he will find that separation from surrounding evil was one of the leading characteristics, and that service and honour was proportionate thereto, but declined and waned as this key to service was neglected or unused."

Feeling as I do, you will understand why I cannot commend, as Mr. Hoste does, those who "have refused to retire quietly over 'the wall' and perpetuate the ancient division, but have had the spiritual energy to ignore 'the wall' altogether, and go in and out wherever they believed the Lord had set before them an open door." So far from leading to unity such action has only led to further

division, and therefore I can only treat those who take this course according to the Scripture which enjoins us to "Mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them" Romans 16:17). That any continue in such a course in spite of all appeals and the evident confusion they make, convinces me that such are acting in self-will; not that they would own this. Alas! for a hundred persons that confess their sins there will hardly be found one who will confess to self-will. Yet there is no more potent force to scatter the sheep than the self-will of sincere men. Self-will can at times hide itself under fair names such as the insistence of divine principles, the liberty of the servant and the service of the Lord but, wherever it is at work, it will make for the scattering of the flock of God.

I believe that if the efforts of a few to break down the barriers were to succeed, no people would rue the day more than the Open Brethren. It would lead to their complete disintegration. I have no confidence in the efforts to bring about any general coming together of Brethren. I doubt if it would be according to the mind of the Lord. He has allowed us to break up and our wisdom will be to bow under His chastening hand, waiting for the moment when at His coming He will bring, not only Brethren so-called, but, all His people together. We "shall be caught up together" is an encouraging word. Then indeed, to use the words of the Prophet, "With the voice together shall they sing; for they shall see eye to eye" (Isaiah 52:8). Until then I desire to make a straight path for my feet, and do nothing that will bring further confusion among the people of God. With Christian regards, Yours affectionately in Christ.

HAMILTON SMITH.

S. The First Epistle to the Thessalonians

The First Epistle to the Thessalonians

Introductory In the different epistles, God has made rich provision of spiritual food suitable for every stage of Christian growth. The Epistles to the Thessalonians were written to the young in the faith. Thus we do not find the unfolding of the counsels of God or of the mystery of the Church, as in the Epistles to the Ephesians and the Colossians. In the First Epistle we have the great practical features of Christianity — faith, love, and hope — which should mark the youngest as well as the oldest. Moreover, the apostle comforts them in their trials, and removes a difficulty that had arisen as to the Christian's hope — the coming of the Lord for His saints. In chapter 1 the apostle dwells on the practical fruits of the gospel received in the power of the Spirit; in chapter 2 on God's special care for the lambs of His flock in leading them through every trial; in chapter 3 on how God uses the trials by the way for the strengthening of faith, love, and holiness; in chapter 4: on the walk pleasing to God in view of the coming of the Lord for His saints; in chapter 5 on exhortations as to the conduct consistent with walking in the light of the day of the Lord, as well as general exhortations and warnings as to dangers that beset the Christian path. The Fruits of the Gospel (1 Thessalonians 1:1-10) In the parable of the Sower (Mark 4:20), the Lord instructed His disciples that where the good seed fell upon good ground fruit would result. In this opening chapter some of the beautiful fruit of the gospel manifests itself in the changed lives of young converts. To understand the epistle it is necessary to recall the gospel preached to these Thessalonians, as recorded in Acts 17:1-9. From this we gather that, during the apostle's visit to Thessalonica, he preached to both Jews and Gentiles. Four things marked his preaching:

1. He presented to them Jesus, the Saviour — not merely doctrines, but a living Person, the Saviour;

2. He alleged that this Person, Jesus, had died and risen again;

3. He not only preached the facts of death and resurrection, but the necessity of these great facts — Christ "must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead";

4. He fell back on Scripture as his sole and sufficient authority. As a result of this preaching, "some" of the Jews and "a great multitude" of the Gentiles believed. Moreover, they proved the reality of their faith by publicly identifying themselves with the Lord's servants, for we read that they "consorted with Paul and Silas." They did not keep their faith to themselves. They made no attempt to escape reproach by remaining secret disciples. They believed in Jesus, and boldly confessed their faith. The result was that they had at once to face persecution. The Jews who believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows and set the whole city in an uproar. Envy led to the first murder, when Cain killed his brother: and envy led to the greatest murder, when the Jews crucified their Messiah. Pilate "knew that for envy they had delivered Him" (Matthew 27:18). If men moved by envy will commit murder, we need not be surprised that respectable Jews stooped to use lewd, base fellows to carry out their ends. Thus we learn the

character of the seed sown, the fruit produced, and the opposition called forth. The apostle writes his epistle to encourage these young converts in persecution, and delights to dwell upon the beautiful fruit of the gospel so manifested.

(1 Thessalonians 1:1-3). The apostle associates with himself those who had laboured with him. In his salutation he views these believers relative to God the Father, and to Jesus Christ as Lord, rather than as members of the body of which Christ is the Head. He encourages them by assuring them that he constantly gives thanks to God for them and remembers them in his prayers. Moreover, he recognises the fruit of the Spirit in them. In calling attention to these happy Christian qualities, the apostle is not flattering them, but gladly recognising in them the evidence of a real work of God. He notes their work, labour, and endurance, but not as marks of true conversion. Men of the world are often famed for great philanthropic works, immense toil, and much perseverance in carrying out their works. In the case of the Thessalonians the apostle can link with these works other qualities which are essentially Christian — "work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope", the three great elements of Christian life that bring the soul into relation with divine Persons, thus giving the marks of a truly converted soul. As evidence of reality, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews refers to these three qualities. He had been speaking solemnly of those who made a profession of Christianity but afterwards apostatised. But of these Christians he can say, "Beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation" — "labour of love", "the full assurance of hope", and "faith and patience" (Hebrews 6:9-12).

Moreover, the reality of their "faith", "love", and "hope" is proved by these beautiful qualities being "in our Lord Jesus Christ". Faith, love, and hope each require an object. In Christianity that supreme Object is a living Person — the Lord Jesus Christ. Every true activity in the Christian life is the outcome of faith which draws all its strength, wisdom, and needed grace from One Who is unseen, and therefore only available for faith. True Christian toil springs from love for our Lord Jesus Christ and is not carried out as a legal duty. The endurance is not dull resignation to stern necessity, but is sustained by hope that waits for our Lord Jesus Christ. Further, the life of faith, love, and hope is lived "in the sight of God and our Father". It is a life of holy fear lived before God, and not simply before man to obtain a religious place, or before the saints to gain a reputation for devotedness. These young believers became "ensamples to all that believe", and their faith to God was spread abroad; but their witness before man was the outcome of a life lived before God — they consciously lived and walked "before our God and Father". "We may indeed zealously contend for a name; but the question before God is as to power and full fruits of grace in the measure of that which has been received; and if the soul does not come up to that, it is a dreadful thing for it to be resting on a religious reputation, while the works are not perfect before God" (J.N.D.).

(1 Thessalonians 1:4-5). Further, these evidences of a work of God in their souls assured the apostle that they were beloved of God and the subjects of His electing grace. Not only has grace met all our responsibilities but, by the sovereign mercy of God, believers were elected before the foundation of the world to obtain salvation with eternal glory (2 Timothy 2:10). If we are elected to eternal glory, we are set apart by the work of the Spirit from this present world. No position of dignity and honour which this world can offer will have any attraction on realising that. This beautiful fruit had been produced in lives by the gospel that came to them, not "in word only, but also in power" by the preaching in the Holy Ghost. Thus there was much assurance. Alas! there

may be much correct gospel preaching, but too often "in word only". The power and work of the Holy Spirit are wanting. What will give power to the preaching and leave the Holy Spirit free to work is the consistent life of the preacher. So the apostle can say, "Ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake." His life confirmed his preaching and thus became part of the testimony that he bore with his lips.

(1 Thessalonians 1:6-7). The result of the testimony in power manifests itself in two ways. First, it led those who received the testimony not only into the blessing of salvation, but to imitate the apostle, and therefore the Lord (N.Tn.). Being blessed they became representatives of the One by Whom they were saved. Secondly, this testimony in power aroused the hatred of those by whom it was rejected. This malice expressed itself in persecuting the believers. Nevertheless, these believers were sustained in joy by the Holy Spirit. The devil may stir up persecution, but the power of the Spirit is greater than all the power of the enemy. Stephen, full of the Holy Ghost, is sustained in triumph in the midst of his martyr sufferings. The martyr whose sufferings only call forth praise to the Lord renders an arresting testimony to the power of God before the world! Thus the joy of these young persecuted converts became an ensample to believers and a testimony to the world around, for in every place their faith towards God had become a matter of wonder.

(1 Thessalonians 1:8-10). Their testimony had a threefold character. First, the word of the Lord was sounded out from them. Secondly, their changed manner of life proved the reality of their conversion and was a witness to the truth of their preaching, for they gave up all their old idolatrous practices, and turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. Scripture not only recognises the actual images of the heathen as idols, but also anything that comes in as an object between the soul and God — "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21). How often the believer’s life and service may be hindered by allowing some earthly pursuit, which in itself may be harmless, to become an object between the soul and God. Thirdly, they turned from the world and its delusions to wait for the Son of God from heaven. All their expectations were in Him. Being converted, they did not vainly attempt to put the world right and make it better and brighter. To deal with the evil, and bring in the blessing, they quietly waited for God’s Son from heaven. They did so in peace and calmness, knowing that Jesus had delivered them from wrath through His death, and that God had declared His satisfaction with the work of Christ, and the believer’s justification from sins and judgment, by raising Christ from the dead.

H. Smith.

S. The First Martyr.

The First Martyr.

Acts 6:1-15 and Acts 7:1-60

Hamilton Smith.

(Extracted from Scripture Truth Vol. 42, 1965-7, pages 118-21) In the touching story of Stephen, the first of a long line of martyrs, we see the complete exposure of the wickedness of Israel on the one hand, and the display of the blessedness of Christianity on the other hand. In the course of his address, Stephen recalls the history of Israel to show that the flesh, even in the professing people of God, invariably resists the man that God is with. This he proves from Scripture by recounting the way the patriarchs had treated Joseph, and the way the nation had resisted Moses. The patriarchs, moved with envy, hated and persecuted Joseph. But God was with him, and highly exalted him. In his exaltation Joseph sends a message to his brethren presenting himself as their saviour and deliverer. Thus Joseph becomes a striking type of Christ, their own Messiah, whom for envy the leaders of Israel had delivered up to be crucified. But God had exalted Christ to His own right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, and from His place of exaltation there had come, through the Holy Spirit, the offer of repentance to Israel and the forgiveness of their sins (Acts 5:31-32).

Then Stephen recalls the history of Moses who, in order to help his own people whom he loved, turned his back on all the glory of Egypt. But Israel "thrust him away" and "refused" the one that God had sent to be "a ruler and a deliverer". In the wilderness they would not obey him but in their hearts turned back to Egypt. Thus again they resisted the man that God was with. As we listen to Stephen’s address we learn the true character of the flesh, whether in the believer or unbeliever, for the flesh never alters.

It is marked by "envy", for the patriarchs in rejecting Joseph were moved by envy; it is ignorant of the mind of God, for when God would deliver Israel by Moses, we read "They understood not" (25); it Is openly hostile to the man that God is with for we read concerning Moses that Israel " thrust him away" (27, 39); it is governed by sight in contrast to faith, for Israel said, "Make us gods to go before US" (40); and it rejoices in its own works rather than in the work of God, for we read that, having made an idol, "they rejoiced in the works of their own hands" (41).

Having reviewed the history of Israel, Stephen concludes his address with a solemn exposure of the condition of the nation. They are rebellious against God — a "stiffnecked people". Whatever outward show of religion they may make, inwardly the flesh is unjudged; they are uncircumcised in heart, and their ears are deaf to the word of God. Thus, he concludes, they are a people who "do always resist the Holy Spirit". As their fathers had done so do they. The fathers had persecuted and slain the prophets, and the children had betrayed and murdered their own Messiah. Moreover the law, in which they boasted, they had not kept.

Up to this point, in the history of the Acts, the Apostles had by the Holy Spirit proclaimed the offer of repentance and forgiveness of sins to the nation of Israel from the exalted Christ, and, they were told, that, if they repented, Christ would come back and bring in the times of refreshing (Acts 4:19-21). This final testimony, for that generation, is utterly rejected. The witness of Christ's heavenly glory is cast out of the city and stoned without mercy. Thus as the witness of Christ on earth had been rejected, so the witness of the Holy Spirit come to earth from the exalted Christ is now rejected.

Thus, for the time, all is over with Israel, and the testimony of God is no longer to Christ reigning on earth, but to Christ glorified in heaven. The position of Christ will ever determine the position and blessing of His people. Is Christ reigning on earth, then His people will be earthly and their blessings take an earthly character. Is Christ glorified in heaven, then His people will belong to heaven and their blessings will have a spiritual and heavenly character. Thus, at this great crisis, we pass from Jerusalem as a centre, where Christ was crucified, to heaven where Christ is glorified. In the great ascension scene, described in the first chapter of the Acts, two angels say to the disciples, "why stand ye gazing up into heaven?" for the door was still open for the earthly blessing under the reign of Christ if the nation repented. Now, for the time, all is over with Israel, and Stephen rightly looks up to heaven and no angels will call in question his heavenward gaze.

Thus we pass from Judaism to Christianity, from earth to heaven, from Christ reigning on earth to Christ exalted in glory. A new era begins during which believers are called out from Jews and Gentiles to form the Church united to Christ in heaven. During this period God has no earthly people, no nation in relationship with Himself and no temple as an earthly centre. Alas! Christendom has sought to act on the old footing and revive Jewish ritual. We have countries spoken of as Christian nations, and favoured people, and again magnificent cathedrals have been erected which are called houses of God, and Christianity is viewed as merely a religious system for the improvement of man's social position and the betterment of the world.

It is of the deepest importance to apprehend that Christianity calls us out of the world and gives us a place in heaven. As believers we shall only be practically saved from earth as we realise that we have a place in heaven. As the Apostle Peter can say, "An inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you". No evil can touch this fair inheritance; no power of the enemy can rob us of heaven. In Stephen we see set forth a believer who enters into the new Christian position, the heavenly position, and the character consistent with this position. Thus we do well to ponder the brief but instructive story of this the first Christian martyr. He comes before us marked in a striking way by Christian qualities, for He is described as a man "full of faith and the Holy Ghost", "full of grace and power", and marked by "wisdom" (Acts 6:5, Acts 6:8 N.Tn., 10). These are the outstanding marks of a Christian. Faith, of necessity, comes first, but having believed the gospel of our salvation we are sealed with the Holy Spirit. Having the Spirit we are exhorted to "be filled with the Spirit". If filled with the Spirit we should be marked by the grace that meets every evil in the spirit of Christ, by power to rise above every circumstance, and the wisdom to meet all opposition. Such Christ-like qualities will not bring the possessor into favour with mere religious profession: so it came to pass that "there arose certain of the synagogue" who "stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and brought him to the council." Here false witnesses charge him with speaking blasphemous words against Moses, against God, against the temple and against the law.

How will Stephen act in the presence of these violent acts and lying charges? All the council turn to look at Stephen. Will his face depict indignation and resentment in the presence of these lying charges? How will his Christianity stand the test of such an ordeal? To their surprise they see no trace of resentment or proud contempt on that face. Looking stedfastly on him they saw his face as if it had been the face of an angel. They saw a face lit up with the light of heaven. We may well challenge our hearts as to how we should have looked and acted under such terrible circumstances! Is it not possible that, in the presence of such gross and wicked charges rising indignation in our hearts would betray itself in angry looks? What, we may ask, was the secret power that enabled Stephen to look like an angel when opposed by the Devil? This brings before us four outstanding marks of Christianity, when lived in the power of the Holy Spirit, so blessedly set forth in Stephen in the closing scene of his life described at the end of Acts 7:1-60.

First, the Christian, full of the Holy Ghost, will be one that looks up stedfastly to Christ in heaven. He realises that all his resources are in Christ — the Man in the glory. He does not look within in the vain endeavour to find something in himself in which he can trust. He does not look around to find support and guidance in others. He looks up, and he looks up stedfastly. He realises that in Christ in glory there is One who is the Head of His people with all wisdom to guide, who has the heart with all love to sympathise with them in their sorrows, and who has the hand with all power to support them in their trials. So the Apostle Paul, at a later date, exhorts us to "run with endurance the race that is set before us looking stedfastly on Jesus the leader and completer of our faith" (Hebrews 2:1-2). We are running the race that ends in heaven, and in that race there will be trials to meet and insults to endure, and it is only as we, like Stephen, look up stedfastly into heaven and fix our gaze on Jesus that we shall be able to endure Thus in Stephen we see set forth the great fact that if the Holy Spirit came down from Christ in heaven it is in order to lead our hearts up to Christ in heaven.

Let us, however, remember that Stephen who looked stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God and Jesus, was a believer who not only was sealed with the Holy Spirit, but was "full of the Holy Spirit". One has said, "To have the Holy Spirit, is one thing: to be filled with the Holy Spirit is another. When He is the one source of my thought, I am filled with Him. When He has possession of my heart, there is power to silence what is not of God, to keep my soul from evil, and to guide in every act of my life and walk" (J.N.D.). Thus being full of the Holy Ghost Stephen looks up to Christ in glory. He does not behold the glory with his natural vision, he was full of the Holy Ghost. But let us remember that this is not confined to Stephen for says the Apostle, "We all beholding the glory of the Lord are changed into His image."

Secondly, the believer that looks up stedfastly to Christ in the glory will be a man that is supported by Christ in heaven. This does not necessarily mean that the Christian will be kept from trial. He may, indeed, be allowed to pass through the most terrible trials, even as Stephen who was falsely charged with blasphemy, cast out of the city, and stoned out of the world. But if Stephen is not kept from trial, he is sustained in the trial and brought through the trial. In these terrible circumstances he realises the truth of the Lord’s words, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee: and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned" (Isaiah 43:12). Thus, with the stones falling upon him, Stephen is called to pass "through the valley of the shadow of death": but he fears no evil for the Lord is with him to support him, and glory is before him.

Thirdly, sustained by the Lord, the Christian becomes a man that is representative of Christ in heaven. Gazing upon the Lord in glory we are changed into the same image from glory to glory. It is only as we are looking at Christ in the glory that the world will be able to look upon us and see something of Christ. Thus Stephen becomes like Christ — the One, Who, in His humiliation was charged with blasphemy but witnessed a good confession before Pontius Pilate, and, "Who when He was reviled, reviled not again; and when He suffered He threatened not". Stephen, with his eye stedfastly fixed upon the Lord, follows in the steps of the Lord. When reviled he utters no taunt, and when he suffers he pronounces no threat. No hard thoughts arise in his heart; no black looks mar his face; no bitter words fall from his lips. One has written, "He bears witness to his Master, forgetful of himself, or his danger, without a thought of consequences. His heart was filled with Christ to the exclusion of care for his life, or what should follow. Christ was the only object before Him" (J.N.D.). Thus, gazing upon the Lord in glory, Stephen becomes changed into His image, and like the Lord, he prays for his enemies, and commits his spirit to the Lord. Thus the man on earth becomes representative of the Man in the glory. He looks up stedfastly into heaven and sees Jesus in the glory, and the world looks stedfastly on Stephen and sees Jesus in Stephen.

Lastly we see that having represented Christ, and his race run and his course finished, the Christian is one that departs to be with Christ in heaven. So Stephen falls asleep and his spirit is received by Christ in the glory. The path of suffering for Christ leads to the glory with Christ.

Thus we see in Stephen a beautiful setting forth of true Christianity according to the mind of the Lord. We see that a believer, filled with the Holy Spirit, is one that will carry out the words of the Lord, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." Entirely occupied with Christ, such an one will, like Stephen, deny himself, make no effort to save his life here, and will follow Christ into the glory. He looks to Christ in the glory; looking to Christ, he is supported by Christ in the glory; supported by Christ, he becomes representative of Christ in the glory, and having finished his course, he departs to be with Christ in the glory.

S. The Fulness of Christ

"The Fulness of Christ."

Ephesians 4:1-16. The leading aim of this portion of the Epistle to the Ephesians is, surely, to make known God's mind that in the Church, viewed as the Body of Christ, there should be set forth "the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13); and this, not only in the day of glory, but, even now, in this world during the night of Christ's absence. Thus, though Christ is no longer personally present, it is God's thought that Christ should be seen in His people in so far as they set forth the moral excellencies of Christ. In connection with this great end, it is important to keep in mind the order in which the truth is presented in the Epistle. In the first part of the Epistle to verse 11 of chapter 3, we have the unfolding of the counsels of God, more especially in connection with the great Mystery concerning Christ and the Church. Then, from Ephesians 3:12 to the end of chapter 3, we have the prayer of the Apostle that there may be wrought in the saints a right spiritual condition in order that they may apprehend the great truths concerning the Mystery. From Ephesians 4:1-32 to Ephesians 6:9, we have the practical exhortations that present the walk that is consistent with the great truths of the Mystery. Finally, from Ephesians 6:10-20, we are warned as to the conflict that the truth will entail.

Thus we have set before us the ministry of the truth; the condition of soul that is necessary for its apprehension; the walk that is consistent with it, and the conflict that it will entail. In Ephesians 4:2-3 the Apostle sums up the walk that is worthy of the truth as characterised by seven moral qualities — lowliness, meekness, longsuffering, forbearance, love, unity, and peace. These marks set forth the moral perfections of Christ in His pathway through this world, and thus, if these beautiful qualities mark the walk of the saints there will be seen in them the reproduction of the fulness of Christ, the perfect Man.

Lowliness expresses the humility of mind that should characterise believers in their thoughts of themselves, in contrast to the vanity and pride that marks the flesh. Meekness is the spirit of gentleness that should mark us in our bearing towards others — the readiness to give place to others in contrast to the self-assertiveness that seeks a place of prominence. Longsuffering suggests the patient spirit that should mark us in relation to the trying circumstances that we may be called to pass through forbearance, the patience with which we should meet all that is trying in others. Further we are warned that love is to be the true motive in showing forbearance. It is possible to show great forbearance in the presence of insults and yet be acting in a spirit of pride that treats the offending brother with silent contempt. Furthermore, the Christian company is to be marked by unity; but this unity is "the unity of the Spirit," which we are to endeavour to keep. The unity of the Spirit is not the unity of a company of people held together by common opinions, or by a unanimous judgment, which may be far from the mind of the Spirit. It is the unity that is the outcome of being members of the body of Christ and is maintained by the saints walking together according to the one mind of the Spirit. Moreover, this unity of the Spirit is to be maintained in the uniting bond of peace. The danger is that if we are not agreed as to the mind of the Spirit we may

fall into contention instead of prayerfully searching the word to learn His mind in the spirit of peace.

These are the qualifications that should characterise the whole Christian company and which are alone worthy of our high calling. No amount of gift, or intelligence in the word, will make up for the lack of these moral qualifications. The Corinthians were enriched in all utterance and in all knowledge, and came behind in no gift; but, alas! they sadly lacked these lovely qualities, which alone would have secured a walk worthy of the Christian calling, and made them witnesses for Christ (1 Corinthians 1:5-7). Lacking these qualities they were marked by contentions, divisions, and were not of one mind (1 Corinthians 1:10-11). In this day of ruin there may be little in the way of outstanding gift that would make us prominent in the world or before one another, but, it is still possible for any little company to bear these lovely traits and thus walk worthy of the calling by expressing something of the character of Christ. In the verses that follow (Ephesians 4:4-6) the Apostle presents a comprehensive view of Christianity in which three circles of unity are set forth, the light of which is to govern our walk and ways.

First, there is one body, and one Spirit, and one hope of our calling. This unity brings before us the immense fact that believers are united together in one body by the one Spirit, and enjoy the same glorious hope. This is a vital and abiding unity into which nothing unreal can enter.

Secondly, there is a unity of those who own one Lord, confess one common faith, and submit to one baptism. This is the unity of a common profession which may be true and real, and yet, alas, may be mere profession. This circle of unity is then obviously larger than the unity of the one body formed by the one Spirit.

Thirdly, there is a unity that binds believers together as having one God and Father whose power and claims extend to the whole creation, for God is above all and works through all, though as regards believers He is in us all. This is the widest circle as embracing all men and affecting the whole creation. In the first circle all human organisations are shut out by one body; the flesh and its activities are excluded by the One Spirit, and earthly hopes give place to the heavenly hope of our calling. In the second circle, the independency and activity of our own wills is excluded by believers coming under the direction of one Lord; error is excluded by the confession of the one faith, and the world shut out by one baptism which separates us from the life of the world in order to have part in the Christian circle apart from the world. In the third circle all the anxious care of the natural man is met by the realisation that as believers we are united together as having one God and Father Who is "above all" that we have to meet down here; Who is working out His ways "through all" circumstances, and who is "in us all," seeing that, as His children, we are partakers of His nature.

How blessed is the perfect standard set before us in these verses! It presents the Christian company in the realisation of the presence of one Spirit, under the direction of one Lord, and cared for by one God and Father, with the result that, walking together in lowliness, meekness, longsuffering, forbearance, love, unity, and peace, the fulness of Christ is set forth.

Alas! in the great Christian profession today we see the practical denial of these three circles of blessing. The one Spirit is set aside by human arrangements; the one Lord is set aside by self-will and independency; and the one God and Father is set aside by the infidel reasonings of modernism. Thus a walk in consistency with these great truths demands separation from every

system of men which, either in principle or practice, denies these truths. The instructions and exhortations that follow have in view a godly walk in consistency with these three spheres of blessing. First, in verses 7 to 16, we have special exhortations in view of the walk that becomes us as members of the one body. Secondly, in verses 17 to 32, we have exhortations that refer to a godly walk as individuals that confess Jesus as Lord. Thirdly, in Ephesians 5:1-33 to verse 9 of chapter 6, we are exhorted as to our walk in all the relationships of life under our God and Father.

(Ephesians 4:7). In the consideration of the Apostle’s exhortations in connection with the one body, we see, first of all, that Christ Himself is working for the blessing of the body. In different measures He gives grace to "every one." As believers we are united to form one body, but as members of that one body we each have our individual service according to the sovereign grace of Christ. Each has a niche to fill in the service of the one body.

(Ephesians 4:8-10). The One Who gives the gifts is the One Who is in the place of supreme power, after having broken all the power of the enemy. The Apostle alludes to Psalms 68:1-35, which speaks of Jehovah being exalted in the midst of His earthly people after having delivered them from all their enemies. Having delivered them He blesses them with gifts. Here the Apostle makes an application of the Psalm to Christ Who has ascended to the place of supreme glory after having redeemed His people from the power of the enemy, and, from His place in glory, blesses them with gifts. In two parenthetical verses the Apostle gives the full implication of this Old Testament Scripture. If Christ has ascended on high it necessarily means that He has first descended into the lower parts of the earth. He has been into death, and from that lowest place He has ascended far above all heavens. Thus He has passed through "all things." So doing He has acquired, as Man, perfect knowledge of every circumstance of life and death that the believer may be called to pass through. In His path from the glory to the cross, and the grave, and in His ascension to a place far above all heavens, He has met temptation and needs, has endured suffering and opposition from men and devils, and has passed through death and the grave. With His perfect knowledge of "all things" He is able to give gifts that will meet our every need as we pass through this world of sorrow and trial on our way to glory.

(Ephesians 4:11). Not only has His grace given to "every one" some special service, but He has also given to "some" special gifts — apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Here there is no mention of the sign gifts of healing and tongues, which were used in connection with the introduction of Christianity, and more especially in relation to the Jew. Here we have the gifts that abide to the end. Apostles and prophets were used to lay the foundation of the Church; so we read that we "are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself, being the chief corner stone" (Ephesians 2:20). We have these gifts preserved to us in the different Epistles. The evangelists go out into all the world, not only for the salvation of souls, but, to bring believing souls into the circle of blessing, thus they too have their part in the service of the one body. The pastor has to do more especially with individuals; they shepherd the sheep. The teacher is more directly concerned with unfolding the truth.

(Ephesians 4:12). The gifts each have their special service, but all are in view of the perfecting of the saints, the work of the ministry, and the edifying of the body of Christ. The exercise of these gifts has in view first of all the blessing of individual saints — the members that compose the body. The individual saints being helped and blest, they will be fitted to take up their special ministry for

others, and thus the great end will be reached — "the edifying of the body of Christ."

(Ephesians 4:13). Then the Apostle sets forth the great end in view in the edification of the body of Christ. It is that all the saints may "arrive at the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God at the full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (N. Tn.). "The faith" is the whole system of Christian truth. The "unity of the faith" is the unity that results from holding in common the truth of Christianity and having the knowledge of the Son of God, the One in Whom God has been made known and by Whom Christianity has been revealed and established (Matthew 16:16-18). The unity of which the Apostle speaks is not a human alliance formed by common agreement or holding a common creed, but a unity that draws saints together in affection through the knowledge of the faith and of the Son of God as revealed to us in the Word of God.

Thus there will be produced in the saints "a perfect," or "full-grown man." In the Second chapter the Apostle speaks of Christ having abolished the enmity between Jew and Gentile "to make in Himself one new man" (Ephesians 2:15). Again, in this chapter, he speaks of the "new man" (Ephesians 4:24). He does not speak of coming to "new men," but unto "a perfect man." The thought of "a perfect man" takes in the whole company of saints in the view of God, seen indeed as many saints, but setting forth "one man." This "perfect man" is set forth in Christ, for the measure of the stature of this perfect man is "the fulness of Christ." The "fulness" speaks of all the moral excellencies of Christ. Every moral quality of Christ is to be portrayed in this one perfect man. Thus the saints are viewed as one man to express the loveliness of Christ. These moral excellencies are brought before us in verses 2 and 3 of this chapter, and again in Colossians 3:12-15. From the Epistle to the Colossians we learn further that in this "new man there are no human distinctions in which men boast and by which they seek to exalt themselves. There are no political distinctions as Jew and Gentile; no religious distinctions as circumcised and uncircumcised; no intellectual pre-eminence over barbarian and Scythian, and no social distinctions between bond and free, but Christ is all and in all. (Colossians 3:10-11). The passage does not refer to what will be true in heaven but to what God would have seen in His people upon earth. It may be said that this is impossible of attainment. That may be so, but God could not set before us anything less than a perfect standard. And let us beware of lowering the standard because of our failure in answering to it. To look abroad at the present time at what exists in professing Christendom, and amongst true believers, with all the con-fusion, strife and division, will only bewilder. It has been truly said, "The truth as to the church is not gained by looking at the church, or the history of it, as man might describe it, but by looking at it from the Divine point of view." In this great passage we have set forth the Divine mind for all God’s saints: it is our business to learn God’s mind and seek to answer to it.

(Ephesians 4:14-15). Having God’s perfect standard before us, and thus established in the truth as set forth in Scripture, we shall no longer be in uncertainty as to the mind of God for His saints. We shall not be like babes tossed to and fro by a strong wind. There are, indeed, adverse influences at work, and men of unprincipled cunning who, with wrong doctrine, are forming systems of error. We have to beware of tampering with this evil. Nothing is more pernicious to believers than occupation with "every wind of doctrine" put forth with the subtlety of crafty men. Our business is to learn the mind of God and grow in the knowledge of the Son of God. We do not escape error by enquiring into all the details of the error, but by the knowledge of the truth. The Lord can say of His sheep, "A

stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him; for they know not the voice of strangers" (John 10:5). Our safety then is found, not in investigation of evil, but in "holding the truth in love" (N. Tn.). Thus we come under the power of the truth and grow in spiritual intelligence according to the perfect mind of Christ Who is the Head — the One in Whom there is set forth all the mind and purpose of God.

(Ephesians 4:16). From Christ, the Head, "the whole body" makes increase in spiritual intelligence and blessing. Here it is not exactly the ministry of gifts, but rather that silent growth of the body through the work of the Lord in all the members, who in different ways and measures can minister to one another in love. This verse sets forth the immense influence we can have on one another, as the result of each one having the mind of Christ through being under the control of the Head. One has truly said, "Many a man has an amount of influence which he never dreamt of, merely because he sought to stand in the mind of God. Many a man that you would have thought was cut out to exercise a great deal of influence, has lost it because he did not continue in the mind of God. As the Apostle said, 'We have no power against the truth, but for the truth' — Stand for the truth and you will find you have great power: — go against the truth, and you will lose the little you appear to have."

Thus in this Scripture we learn, first, that gifts have been given from Christ, the ascended Head of the Church in different measures and forms to "every one" of the members (Ephesians 4:7-11). Secondly, the great end for which the gifts have been given is that believers may be united to form one new man to set forth the moral perfections of Christ (Ephesians 4:13). Thirdly, that being established in these great truths we may be preserved from error (Ephesians 4:14). Lastly, being preserved from error, that there may be spiritual growth in the one body, in the spirit of love (Ephesians 4:15-16).

Thus we learn the rich provision that has been made in order that the fulness of Christ may be seen in His people, during the time of His absence, while waiting for the day when the church will be presented to Himself "A glorious church not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing." Then, indeed, it will be altogether like Himself, "HOLY AND WITHOUT BLEMISH."

H. Smith.

S. The Garden of the Lord.

The Garden of the Lord.

Hamilton Smith. A garden enclosed is my sister, [my] spouse; A spring shut up, a fountain sealed.

Thy shoots are a paradise of pomegranates, with precious fruits;

Henna with spikenard plants;

Spikenard and saffron;

Calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense Myrrh and aloes, with ail the chief spices: A fountain in the gardens, A well of living waters Which stream from Lebanon.

Awake, north wind, and come, [thou] south;

Blow upon my garden, [that] the spices thereof may flow forth.

Let my beloved come into his garden, And eat its precious fruits.

I am come into my garden, my sister, [my] spouse;

I have gathered my myrrh with my spice;

I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey;

I have drunk my wine with my milk.

Eat, O friends; drink, yea drink abundantly, beloved onesl!

(Song of Solomon 4:12-16, Song of Solomon 5:1). With these choice words from the Song of Songs, the Bridegroom likens His bride to a garden of delights. Probably, all believers, with hearts opened to understand the Scriptures, would agree that in the Bridegroom, or the "Beloved", of the Song of Songs, we have a beautiful figure of Christ. Most would also concede that, in the interpretation of the Song, the bride sets forth Christ’s earthly people.

While, however, the strict interpretation of the bride has Christ’s earthly people in view, we are surely warranted in making an application to the Church, the heavenly bride of Christ.

Furthermore, if we may discover in this garden the excellencies that Christ would find in His heavenly bride, do we not at the same time learn what the love of Christ is looking for in the hearts of those who compose the bride? May we then, for a little, meditate upon this garden, with its spring, its fruit, its spices, and its living waters, as describing what the Lord would have our hearts to be for Himself.

First, we notice that the Bridegroom always speaks of the garden as "My garden"; while the bride delights to own it is "His garden". "Awake O north wind . . . blow upon My garden," says the Bridegroom. The bride replies, "Let my Beloved come into His garden." In response, the

Bridegroom says, "I am come into My garden." The application is plain — the Lord claims our hearts for Himself. "My son, give Me thine heart," says the Preacher (Proverbs 23:26). "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts," is the exhortation of an Apostle (1 Peter 3:15): and again, another Apostle can pray that "Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith" (Ephesians 3:17).

It is not simply our time, our means, our brains, and our busy service, that the Lord desires, but first, and above all, He claims our affections. We may give all our goods to the poor, and our bodies to be burned, but, without love it will profit nothing. The Lord is still saying to us, "Give Me shine heart."

"Thou hast left thy first love", was a solemn word indicating that whatever excellencies belonged to the believers thus addressed, their hearts had ceased to be a garden for the Lord. As one has said, "A wife may take care of the house, and fulfil all her duties so as to leave nothing undone for which her husband could find fault; but if her love for him has diminished, will all her service satisfy him if his love to her be the same as at first?" (J.N.D.).

Above all, then, the Lord claims the undivided affection of our hearts. The garden must be His garden. Moreover, if the Lord claims our hearts to be a garden for His delight, they must have the marks of the garden that is according to His mind. As we read this beautiful description of the garden of the Lord, we note five outstanding features which set forth in figure what the Lord would have our hearts to be for Himself. First, the garden of the Lord is an enclosed garden. Secondly, it is a watered garden, with its spring shut up and its fountain sealed. Thirdly, it is a fruitful garden — a paradise of pomegranates with precious fruits. Fourthly, it is a fragrant garden, with trees of frankincense, and all the chief spices. Lastly, it is a refreshing garden from whence "the living waters" flow, and the fragrance of its spices is carried to the world around. The garden enclosed. If the heart is to be kept as a garden for the pleasure of the Lord, it must be as "a garden enclosed." This speaks of a heart separate from the world, preserved from evil, and set apart for the Lord. May we not say that, in the Lord’s last prayer, we learn the desire of His heart that His people should be as "a garden enclosed"? We hear Him tell the Father, that His own are a separate people, for He can say, "They are not of this world, even as I am not of the world". Again, He desires that they may be a preserved people,for He prays, "Keep them from the evil". Above all, He prays that they may be a sanctified people, for He says, "Sanctify them through thy truth" (John 17:14-17). Does not the Preacher exhort us to keep our hearts as "a garden enclosed", when he says, "Keep thy heart more than anything that is guarded"? (Proverbs 4:23, N. Tr.). Again we do well to heed the Lord’s own words, "Let your loins be girdled about". Unless the girdle of truth holds in our affections and thoughts, how quickly our minds will be drawn away by the things of this world, and the heart cease to be "a garden enclosed".

Again, the Apostle James desires that our hearts may be preserved from evil, when he warns us, "If ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth . . . for where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work" (James 3:14-16). Never has there been a scene of confusion and strife amongst the people of God that has not had its hidden root, of envy and strife, in the heart. We may be sure that the heart that entertains bitterness, envying, and strife, will be no garden for the Lord.

How necessary, then, to have our hearts kept in separation from the world, and preserved from evil. Nevertheless, the refusal of the world, and the flesh, will not be enough to constitute our

hearts "a garden enclosed." The Lord desires that our hearts may be sanctified, or set apart for His pleasure, by being occupied with the truth and all that is according to Christ. Does not the Apostle Paul set before the Philippians "a garden enclosed" — a heart sanctified for the Lord, when he says, 'Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are noble, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue and if there be any praise, think on these things'?

If the heart is full of cares, fretting over wrongs, and full of bitterness towards those who may have acted badly towards us: if we are entertaining evil imaginations, malicious thoughts, and revengeful feelings towards a brother, it is very certain our hearts will be no garden for the Lord.

If then we would have our hearts freed from things that defile and turn the heart into a barren waste, choking the garden with weeds, let us follow the instruction of the Apostle when he tells us, "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." Having, like Hannah of old, poured out our hearts before the Lord, and unburdened our minds of all the cares, the sorrows, and the trials that pressed upon our spirits, we shall find that "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus". Thus set free from all that might come in between the soul and God, our hearts will be at liberty to enjoy the things of Christ, and our minds free to "think on these things" — these holy and pure things which should mark one whose heart is "a garden enclosed". A watered garden. The heart that is set apart for the Lord will have its hidden source of refreshment and joy. It will be a garden with "a spring shut up" and "a fountain sealed". A spring is an unfailing supply; a fountain rises up to its source. The Prophet can say, of one who walks according to the mind of the LORD, that his soul shall be "like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not" (Isaiah 58:11). To the woman of Sychar the Lord spoke of giving "a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life", to be "in" the believer. The world is entirely dependent upon surrounding circumstances for its passing joy; the believer has a spring of joy within — the hidden life lived in the power of the Holy Spirit. As the spring of life the Holy Spirit meets all our spiritual needs by guiding us into "all truth": as the fountain of life, He engages our hearts with Christ above. The Lord can say, "the Spirit of truth which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me" — Christ in His new place in the glory. Thus as the Spring, He refreshes our souls with the truth; as the Fountain springing up to its source, He engages our hearts with Christ.

Let us, however, remember that the spring, which is the source of blessing, is "a spring shut up", and the fountain is "a fountain sealed". Does this not remind us that the source of blessing in the believer is sealed to this world, and wholly apart from the flesh? The Lord speaks of the Comforter as One that "the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you" (John 14:17). Again we read, "the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other" (Galatians 5:17).

Alas! we may mind the things of the flesh, and turn aside to the world, only to find we grieve the Spirit so that our hearts, instead of being as a watered garden, become but a dry and barren waste. A fruitful garden. The "spring" and the "fountain" will turn the garden of the Lord into a fruitful garden — "a paradise of pomegranates with precious fruits". The ungrieved Spirit will produce in our hearts "the fruit of the Spirit", which, the Apostle tells us, "is love, joy, peace,

longsuffering, kindness, goodness, fidelity, meekness", and "self-control" (Galatians 5:22). What, indeed, are these precious fruits of the Spirit but the reproduction of the character of Christ in the believer? The fountain, rising up to its source, occupies with Christ and His excellencies; and, beholding the glory of the Lord we are changed into the same image from glory to glory. Thus the hears becomes a garden of the Lord bearing precious fruit for the delight of His heart. A fragrant garden. Not only is the garden of the Lord a garden of precious fruits, but a garden of spices from which sweet odours arise. In Scripture, fruit speaks of the excellencies of Christ, but the spices, with their fragrance, speak of worship that has Christ for its object. In worship there is no thought of receiving blessing from Christ, but of bringing the homage of our hearts to Christ. When the wise men from the East found themselves in the presence of "the young Child", they fell down and "worshipped Him", and "presented unto Him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh" (Matthew 2:11).When Mary anointed the feet of Jesus with "a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly," she was not, as on other occasions, at His feet as a receiver to get instruction, or find sympathy in her sorrow; she was there as a giver to render the worship of a heart filled with the sense of His blessedness. It was good to beat His feet to hear His word, and, again,to beat His feet to receive comfort in sorrow, but in neither case do we read of the ointment with its odour. But when she is at His feet as a worshipper, with her precious ointment, we read, "the whole house was filled with the odour of the ointment" (John 12:1-3). The Philippian saints in their gift to the Apostle, may indeed have shown forth some of the excellencies of Christ — His comfort of love and compassions — and thus bring forth fruit that would abound to their account; but there was in their gift the spirit of sacrifice and worship which was as "an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God" (Php 2:1; Php 4:17-18). In our day, if our hearts are to be a garden of the Lord, let us not forget that the Lord not only looks for the precious fruits of the Spirit, reproducing in us something of His lovely traits, but also the spirit of worship that rises up to Him as a sweet odour. A refreshing garden. Lastly, the Lord would have His garden to be a source of refreshment to the world around. A garden from whence there flow the "living waters". Thus the Lord can speak of the believer, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, as being a source of blessing to a needy world, as He says, "Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:38-39).

Thus we learn, from the Song of Songs, that the Lord would fain possess our hearts as a garden of delights for Himself. He stands at the door of our hearts and knocks, for He desires to come in and dwell within our hearts. If we are slow to let Him in, He may say, as the Bridegroom in the Song, "Awake, O north wind; and come thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out." He may allow adverse circumstances, trials and sorrows, in order to drive us to Himself, so that we may say like the bride, "let my Beloved come into His garden."

If we open to Him we shall experience the truth of His own words, "If any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him and he with Me" (Revelation 3:20). In like spirit, when the bride says, "Let my Beloved come into his garden," the Bridegroom at once responds, "I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse: I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey."

If then, the heart of the believer be kept separate from the world, preserved from evil, and set apart for the Lord it will become like "a garden enclosed." In that garden there will be found a spring of secret joy and refreshment that, like a fountain, rises to its source. The fountain, springing up to its source, will bring forth precious fruit, the excellencies of Christ. The fruit that speaks of the moral

traits of Christ in the heart of the believer, will lead to worship that rises up as a sweet odour to the heart of Christ. The heart that goes out in worship to Christ will become a source of blessing to the world around. In the light of these Scriptures we may well pray the prayer of the Apostle when he bows his knees to the Father, and asks, "That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith" (Ephesians 3:14-17). A wretched thing it were, to have our heart Like a thronged highway or a populous street Where every idle thought has leave to meet, Pause, or pass on as in an open mart; Or like some road-side pool, which no nice art Has guarded that the cattle might not beat And foul it with a multitude of feet, Till of the heavens it can give back no part. But keep thou shine a holy solitude, For He would walk there, would walk alone;

He who would drink there, must be first endued With single right to call that stream His own;

Keep thou thine heart, close-fastened, unrevealed, A fencéd garden and a fountain sealed.

R. C. Trench.

Chapter 57

S. The Glories of the Mount.

The Glories of the Mount.

Luke 9:28-62

Hamilton Smith Part 1 The Glories of the Mount

Following the Lord in His perfect path we are led, in Luke 9:1-62, into two scenes of surpassing interest. One scene unfolds itself on the Mount of Transfiguration; the other is enacted in the Plains of Galilee. On the Mount we find ourselves in company with Christ in the midst of heavenly things, learning the secrets of the Father's heart. In the Plain we have Christ in company with us amid the sorrows of earth, there to learn the secrets of our hearts in the presence of the grace of His heart. For the good and prosperity of our souls we do well to linger awhile in both these scenes. The Mount, however, must precede the Plain. Our hearts must be assured of our part in the glories of the Mount before we can face the sorrows of the Plain.

Let us then for awhile turn aside from man, and his small world, and, as it were, ascend the Mount, seeking in spirit to breathe its holy atmosphere and delight our souls in its varied glories.

We are not left to our own spiritual discernment to interpret the scene on the Mount, for we have the inspired account of one who was present. Referring to the time when he and others were with Christ on "the holy mount," Peter can say "we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses 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" (2 Peter 1:16-18). Thus Peter plainly tells us that the holy Mount gives us a foretaste of the glories and the joys that we shall share at the coming, or "presence" of the Lord. For long He has been absent, but when at last He is present and we in His presence, we shall see His majesty. We who have seen the shame and dishonour heaped upon Him by man, shall see with great delight the "honour and glory" that He will receive from the Father. In company with Christ we shall be ushered into the Father's presence and hear the Father's voice telling us of His delight in His beloved Son. The holy Mount gives us a foretaste of these coming glories. Here, indeed, we partake of the fatness of God's house, and drink of the river of His pleasures.

Entering upon this scene of blessedness we are at once encountered with a holy mystery. For all this eternal weight of glory is introduced with a praying Man. "It came to pass . . . He took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. And as He prayed, the fashion of His countenance was altered." The sorrows of earth can be traced back to the disobedience and independence of one man. The glories of the world to come commence with the obedience and dependence of one Man. The coming glories of heaven centre round a praying Man on earth.

Then, as with great delight we gaze upon the Lord in prayer, we are permitted to see the praying Man changed into the glorified Man. "His countenance was altered, and His raiment was white and

glistening." When man became independent of God, he ceased to glorify God and became the dishonoured man (Romans 1:21-32): here is One who became the dependent Man, glorified God, and He Himself is glorified. On earth we see the glory of man which, Peter reminds us, is as the flower of the field, for it "falleth away"; but on the Mount we get with Peter a passing vision of a glory that will never pass away. We see "His majesty" and His glory. But the Mount has further blessed disclosures, for it tells us not only that we shall see His glory, but we shall share His glory. We shall not only be delighted beholders, but privileged partakers. And so we read "there talked with Him two men. " To be spectators of a scene of unparalleled glory would not satisfy the heart's deep longings. Again to have part in a glory from which Christ was absent, would not be enough. Such, however, the grace that leads to glory, that we shall behold the glory, and share the glory, and share it with Him.

Furthermore the Mount tells us another blessed fact, that we shall not only be with Him but shall also be like Him; and so we read not only that Moses and Elias appeared, but they "appeared in glory." We shall not only see the glory and share the glory, but we shall be suited to the glory. Moses has done with his wilderness staff; Elias has laid aside his prophet's mantle. The days of their humiliation have for ever passed away and they appear in glory. Not only are they with Christ, but they are like Christ, and they are suited to be with Christ, because they are like Christ. On earth it does not yet appear what we shall be, but on the Mount we get a glimpse of what we shall be when He appears. We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is (1 John 3:2) Nor is this all, for the Mount discloses another secret. Not only shall we share the glory and be suited to the glory, but we shall be at home in the glory. For we read of Moses and Elias that they "talked with Him." This speaks of the holy, happy intercourse of saints in glory. Had it been written merely that He talked with them, we might judge that they would have been delighted but silent listeners. If, however, they can talk with Him, all distance and reserve are gone. The disciples had indeed held sweet intercourse with Christ on earth, howbeit, at times with a measure of restraint, but in glory there will be holy, happy intercourse with the Lord without a trace of reserve.

Further, we not only see that in glory there will be free and happy communion, but we learn the great theme of heaven's intercourse. They "spake of His decease which He should accomplish." Immediately before, as directly after the scene on the Mount, the Lord refers to His death (vv. 22, 24), but we read "they understood not" (v. 45). In the Plain they are dull of hearing; on the Mount there is divine intelligence in the mind of heaven and the heart of Jesus. There Moses and Elias commune with Christ about that which fills His heart. They lose sight of the enmity of men; they no longer think of the death of Christ as brought about by wicked hands, but rather of "His decease which He should accomplish." Man's part in that great transaction calls aloud for judgment upon the world. What He did sends the glad tidings to earth's remotest bounds. Moreover they see that His death would be accomplished "at Jerusalem." How passing strange to a Jew. In the very place from whence the Messiah is going to reign, and where He will receive a throne and a crown, that there He should accomplish His death, and receive a cross and a grave. But on the Mount such wonders are spoken of without astonishment. There all is clear. The glory of the kingdom must be established in righteousness. To meet the righteous claims of God He must accomplish His decease. The sufferings must come before the glory. Righteousness must be met in the death of Christ at Jerusalem, if the grace of God is to flow out world wide "beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47).

Moses had given the law, but none knew better than Moses how utterly the nation had failed under the law. Elias had been raised up to recall backsliding Israel to Jehovah, only to prove their hopeless condition. Christ Himself had come, full of grace and truth, only to be utterly rejected. Moses, Elias, and above all Christ Himself, are the witnesses of the nation's guilt and the deep necessity for the sufferings of Christ if they are to reach the glories of the Kingdom. No longer does Moses call the people "rebels"; no longer does Elias charge the children of Israel with having forsaken the covenant, thrown down the altars, and slain the prophets. They look beyond the nation and the wickedness of men; they see Christ, the death that He shall accomplish, and the glories that are on beyond. They indeed looked on to the glory through the death of Christ; we shall look back from the glory to the decease which He accomplished. It was their theme on the Mount, it will be our song in the glory of which the Mount was but a blessed earnest.

Finally, in this great scene we are carried into a glory that exceeds the glory of the Kingdom, for we are led into the Father's house. "There came a cloud and overshadowed them." They were surrounded and covered by the cloud. These Jewish disciples would well understand the significance of the cloud telling them of the Shekinah glory that of old filled the dwelling place of God and spoke of the presence of God. In the days of their wilderness journey the cloud was over Israel, but they never entered the cloud. Here on the Mount, on the ground of the death of Christ that He was about to accomplish, and in company with a glorified Christ, these disciples enter into the Father's house. And in the Father's house they hear the Father's voice, and the Father's voice declares the Father's heart. They hear the Father saying, "This is My beloved Son, hear Him." As one has said, "the Father does not say, This is the Son whom you ought to adore and admire, but He tells us His own thoughts about Him." "This is My beloved Son." It is not simply that we are reminded that Christ is our Beloved, as the bride in the Song of Songs can say, "My Beloved is mine, and I am His," but we hear the Father saying, "This is My Beloved." Beloved indeed because of His own intrinsic excellence, but "Beloved" also because of the decease He was about to accomplish. "Therefore doth My Father love Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again." We have just learned that the heart of the Son is occupied with the obedience of love to the Father in going into death, and now we learn that the Father's heart is delighting in the Son. Here, then, it is our privilege to have fellowship with divine Persons; to have fellowship with the Son in His thoughts of perfect obedience to the Father's will, and have fellowship with the Father in His delight in the Son.

What a portion and prospect is thus opened to the believer by the death of Christ which He should accomplish at Jerusalem, and the glory of Christ that would follow, a prospect that gives us to enter the Father's house, to hear the Father's voice, and discloses to us the Father's heart!

Again we say what a scene is this which brings us into touch with things which "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him!" Truly a foretaste of the universe of bliss where man will be brought into dependence upon God, in a scene of glory, with Christ and like Christ. There to be at home with Christ, speak of all that is in His heart, and learn the secrets of the Father's heart.

Small, indeed, may be the measure in which we taste the blessedness of such a scene. Like the disciples the heaviness of earth clings to us and the infirmities of the body hamper us, so that we see but little into the heart of these heavenly mysteries. Yet for our comfort we read, "When they

were awake they saw His glory." Nor will it be otherwise with ourselves, for, says the apostle, "Awake thou that sleepest . . . and Christ shall shine upon thee." And in His light we shall see light; we shall see the coming glories, we shall look beyond the shadows on the valley and see the sunlight on the hills, but above all we shall see "the King in His beauty," the One who is "the chiefest among ten thousand," and "altogether lovely."

Part 2 The Sorrows of the Plain The Mount, with its foretaste of coming glories, is a happy place for the soul to visit; nevertheless the Plain, with its sorrows, is our daily lot as we journey through this world. But though we have to leave the Mount and face the Plain, we are not called to leave the company of Jesus; for we read, "When the voice was past Jesus was found alone." The vision of glory fades, the cloud is lifted, the voice is silent, but Jesus remains, and remains alone with His disciples.

Jesus had taken the disciples with Him into the Mount; now the disciples will have Jesus with them in the Plain. They face the Plain with the secret of the Mount in their hearts: a secret that in those days they will keep close, for they tell no man of the things which they had seen. The glories they had looked upon, the place they had entered, and the voice they had heard, are beyond the capacity and desires of the natural mind. However, the day will come when Peter will no longer keep these things close, but will tell those who have received like precious faith, of the Majesty of the Lord, of the excellent glory, and of the Father’s voice. Peter’s disclosure will also speak of the abiding impression made upon the souls of the disciples by their visit to the Mount. Henceforth the lowly Jesus that they follow is One whom they have seen in power and glory, and though their pilgrim path may at times be dark, it is lit up with the light of the glory to which it leads. For ourselves, too, what a difference it makes if we have seen the King in His beauty, and take our journey through the sorrows of the Plain in the light of the Christ of the Mount.

Thus the disciples and ourselves are prepared to face the Plain and its sorrows. Coming down from the hill, they meet "much people," an only child under the power of the devil, and faithless disciples (vv. 37-41). They are face to face with a needy world, the power of the devil, and the unbelief of the flesh.

These sorrows of the Plain find their expression in the pitiful case of the man who beseeches the Lord to look upon his only son. The father’s heart racked with distress, his son’s body torn by the devil, the crowd unconcerned, and the disciples of the Lord helpless! What a picture is this of the world in which we are! A needy but callous world around us, the devil against us, and the flesh within us. Though like the disciples we have the Lord in all His grace with us, and the Lord with His coming glory before us. It is as if He said, "I have shown you on the Mount the glory to which I will bring you; I will now show you in the Plain the grace that can keep you every step of the journey on the way to the glory."

If, however, we are to learn the exceeding grace of His heart, we must discover our weakness to lean on His strength, our need to draw upon His grace. Hence it is that the Lord discovers to the disciples, and to ourselves, the true character of the flesh (vv. 41-45); the different forms of selfishness that it assumes (vv. 46-56); and lastly, the different ways in which we may be hindered by nature (vv. 57-62).

First we have the exposure of the flesh in its unbelief (vv. 40-41). In the presence of the failure of the disciples to cast out the demon, the Lord has to say, "O unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you and suffer you?" (v. 41, N. Tr.). Desperate need was there in the case of the child possessed with the demon; grace was there to meet the need in the Person of Jesus; the professed disciples of the Lord were there, but, alas, the world looks to them in vain. They are helpless by reason of the unbelief of the flesh that renders them incapable of using the power of the Lord at their disposal, and the perversity of the flesh that could not profit by all the marvellous manifestations of His power and grace. In one brief sentence the Lord indicates the serious result of the unbelief of His professed disciples. He asks, "How long shall I be with you and suffer you?" Words implying that the period of the Lord's presence in grace was drawing to its close; and that the end would be brought about, not by the evil of the world nor the terrible power of Satan, but because those who professed His Name were unable to use the grace and power that Christ had brought into the world. The Lord does not say, "O needy world, how long shall I be with you?" for it was the need of the world that brought Him into it, but He asks of unbelieving disciples, "How long shall I be with you and suffer you?" Solemn consideration for ourselves, for it is not otherwise in this the day of grace. It is the failure of that which professes the Name of Christ upon the earth that will bring the dispensation to a close; as we read, "Toward thee [professing Christendom] goodness, if thou continue in His goodness; otherwise thou also shall be cut off" (Romans 11:22). The dispensation was opened by the power and goodness of God, and will be closed by the incapacity of those who have professed the Name of Christ to use His power and grace.

However, for our comfort, be it noted that the failure of those who profess the Name of Christ only serves to bring to light the unfailing resources of Christ for those who have faith in Himself. Very blessedly this comes to light in this fine scene. Having spoken of our faithlessness and perversity, the Lord immediately adds, "Bring thy son hither." The first portion of the verse exposes our hearts, the latter part reveals His heart. It is as if He said, "However much you fail, you will find in Me an unfailing resource, so that whatever you find in your hearts, and whatever your needs, come to Me, bring them all to Me." The dispensation was drawing to a close, yet as long as the Lord was present, His grace and power were available for all that brought their needs to Him. So today, again, the dispensation fast hastens to its close, the shadows lengthen and the darkness deepens, but as one has truly said, "As long as Christ's grace is at work, if there is only one saint on the earth and everything else failed around, he would find the power of Christ ready to be exercised on his behalf." How comforting then is the truth that underlies these words of the Lord, "Bring thy son hither." May it be our happy portion to profit by them in bringing our needs, our sorrows, our difficulties, and our exercises to Christ. And yet the fact of bringing our exercise to Christ may at times make the difficulties appear greater. As in the case before us, when in answer to the Lord's word they bring the child, we read, "the devil threw him down and tare him." Nothing so enrages the devil as a saint turning to the Lord in prayer. It may become the occasion of a fresh and violent outburst of the devil's opposition which accentuates the very trouble we desire to have removed, but in the end it only magnifies the grace and power that acts for our relief.

But, alas, the display of the grace and power of the Lord becomes a fresh occasion for the exposure of the unbelief of the human heart, for we read, "they were all amazed at the mighty power of God," and again, "they wondered every one at all things which Jesus did." How humbling was this amazement and wonder. How far man must have departed from God if he shows no

amazement at the power of the devil, but is amazed when God puts forth His power. Seeing that God was present in the Person of Jesus, the amazing thing would be if He did not act in power. We might well be amazed at the power of the devil and the powerlessness of the disciples, but only unbelief could wonder at the mighty power of God.

Thus the Lord has exposed to us the unbelief of the flesh. Then, having acted in power in casting out the demon, the Lord takes occasion to warn us of another form of flesh — the pride of the flesh — which would seek to take occasion by the display of power to exalt itself (vv. 43, 44). This display of power might lead to the thought that Christ is in honour in this world, forgetting that He is rejected of men. The Lord checks this thought by saying to the disciples, "Let these sayings sink down into your ears; for the Son of Man shall be delivered into the hands of men." The disciples were looking for a kingdom in power, the Lord had before Him crucifixion in weakness. Theirs was the mind to exalt themselves in Kingdom glory and power. His was the lowly mind to humble Himself even to death. They were looking for the display of power before men; He for rejection by men. The Kingdom in power will come, as the scene on the Mount surely tells us, but it is reached through the rejection by men and the suffering of the cross.

Moreover, behind the pride of the flesh there is the ignorance of the flesh; as we read, "they understood not" (v. 45). How little are the words of the Lord even yet understood by many devoted Christians. How much of the effort put forth by Christians is to make some appeal to man by the display of outward power — the power of imposing buildings, the power of music, the power of eloquence, the power of scholarship. How little are we prepared to accept the cross and the rejection of Christ, and take the outside place of reproach and weakness, in company with the poor, and weak, and despised of this world.

Further, behind the ignorance of the flesh there is the distrust of the flesh. Not only were the disciples ignorant, but we read, "they feared to ask Him." They lacked the confidence in Christ that would have led them to express their difficulties to Christ. Alas, we are often like Peter, in the Upper Room, not near enough to the Lord to tell Him all our difficulties. If, like John, we were resting in His love, how easy it would be to take to Him all our hard questions.

Thus in this short passage we have the flesh exposed in its unbelief, pride, ignorance, and distrust. The disciples were faithless as to the power and grace of Christ, ignorant of the mind of Christ, and lacking confidence in the heart of Christ. Nevertheless, for our comfort, we see that if Christ uses the sorrows of the Plain to expose our hearts it is only that He may reveal the grace of His heart. If He exposes our evil it is in the presence of a grace that meets it all.

How is it that in this day, with its great privileges, we are still so often marked by unbelief, pride, ignorance, and lack of confidence in the Lord? Is it not that we have self before us as an object rather than Christ. This is strikingly brought before us in the next portion of the chapter (vv. 46-56). In these verses the Holy Spirit brings before us different forms in which selfishness may express itself. The first form is personal selfishness (vv. 46-48). The disciples reasoned amongst themselves which of them should be the greatest. They were measuring greatness after the manner of men; but how different is the greatness of man to the greatness of God. The greatness of man is expressed by seeking to exalt self, at the expense of others, to the highest place, in company with the greatest persons. The greatness of God is expressed by a Man who comes into the lowest place and associates with the insignificant and despised. This is the path to true

greatness and was trodden in perfection by Christ, and hence God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a Name which is above every Name (Php 2:5-9). The second form of selfishness is party selfishness (vv. 49, 50). We read that John answered and said, "Master, we saw one casting out devils in Thy Name; and we forbad him, because he followeth not with us." Here John is apparently not thinking of himself personally, but of the company, the "us." This is a more subtle form of selfishness than the last, because it has the appearance of ignoring self for the good of the company you are with. In reality it generally means the desire to exalt the company in order to make something of self. This is indeed party-selfishness. John and those with him forbad the man to cast out demons, not because it was a wrong thing to do, but because he did not follow with them. What the man was doing might indeed have been for the glory of Christ and the blessing of man, but it was not done in connection with "us," and therefore added nothing to "us," and so in the eyes of John must be condemned. But in so thinking and speaking, John had before him the disciples and their importance, rather than Christ and His honour. In His reply the Lord in tender grace uses John's word, but rebukes John's thought. "Forbid him not; for he that is not against us is for us." The Lord does not say the man is "with us" but "for us." The disciples indeed were both "with Christ" and "for Christ." The man was "for" Christ, and in this sense was "for" the disciples, for they, too, were "for" Christ. Blessed to be, like the disciples in any true sense with Christ in the place of reproach, but let such beware that they cast no slight upon those who are "for" Christ, even if by reason of their associations they cannot walk with them. The last form of selfishness is the exaltation of self under the cloak of zeal for the Lord (vv. 51-56). We have had selfishness seen in zeal for self; then selfishness hiding itself under zeal for party; now we have selfishness cloaking itself under zeal for the Lord. Of all forms of selfishness this is the most subtle and difficult to detect, for who can complain of zeal for the Lord, or say that is wrong? and yet under zeal for the Lord there may lurk zeal for self. It was so in this case. The earthly path of the Lord was drawing to its close. He was about to be received up, and His face was set to go to Jerusalem. His path lay through the Samaritan villages, and they would not receive Him. Their fathers had rejected Elijah of old, the children now reject Elijah's Lord and Master. The disciples, resenting the insult put upon their Master, would fain invoke the judgment of heaven upon these Christ-rejectors, even as Elijah had called down the fire from heaven upon his enemies. Zeal for Christ would desire the judgment of His enemies, righteousness might seem to demand it, and a Scripture precedent would support such a course; nevertheless the Lord rebukes His disciples, saying, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of." Underneath their zeal the Lord detects and exposes a spirit that is entirely alien to Himself. The Lord was exercising power in grace to meet man's need. The disciples would exercise power in judgment to gratify their own self-importance. He would show grace for the blessing of others. They would exercise judgment for the exaltation of themselves. The rejection of their Lord and Master, with all His grace and power, by these corrupt Samaritans, raised the anger and resentment of the disciples, because they had some self-importance to maintain, and this self-importance had been slighted by the insult shown to their Master. The disciples would take advantage of the wickedness of these people to exercise a judgment they deserved, but they would do so in the spirit of retaliation. Self was the secret of their proposal, but hidden under the cloak of zeal for the Lord.

How different the spirit of the Lord, the One whose grace had been so slighted. Though Lord of all He was here with a tender heart and a lowly mind, having no self-importance to maintain. Hence the rejection that calls forth the disciples' indignation, only reveals His patient and silent

submission, even as a little later, His rejection by Jerusalem calls forth His tears. James and John would consume the rejectors of their Master with fire, as later Peter would fight against them with a sword. But Christ, without resentment and without retaliation, will pass on to another village.

There is yet another great hindrance to our service and testimony for the Lord. Not only the flesh, in its different forms of selfishness, but nature with its claims may be a very real hindrance. This comes before us in the closing verses of the chapter (vv. 57-62).

First we learn that the energy of nature cannot take the path of true discipleship. One comes to the Lord saying, "I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest." This may have been the outcome of a generous impulse that drew the man to the Lord. At the same time it betrays the levity of nature that apprehended not who the Lord was, where He was going, or the path He was treading. He was indeed the rejected Man; He was "in the way" to be received up into a world of glory, yet, on the way, in this present world, He had no home and only a cross and a grave before Him. It would be wiser to go to the foxes for a hole, and the birds for a nest, than to come to the Son of Man for a home on earth. The energy of nature, however genuine, was not prepared for such a path. Nature can do much but it cannot forgo itself, its ease, its comforts, to follow a rejected Lord. And thus the path having been put before this volunteer we hear no more of him.

Further, we learn that the relationships of nature may be a real hindrance in the service of the Lord (vv. 59-60). In this case the man is called to follow the Lord by the Lord Himself. The first man, acting in the lightness of nature, sees no difficulties: this man being called by the Lord is at once conscious of difficulties. As Moses in an earlier day, acting in the energy of nature, thought to find it a simple matter to put things right among the people of God; but when called of God he can see nothing but difficulties. So with this man in the gospel day; his difficulty appeared to be great — an aged father drawing nigh to the grave, and dependent upon the son. Faced with this difficulty the man says, as it were, "I am ready to answer to the call, but suffer me first to wait until my father has died and I have carried out my last duties in connection with this natural claim." This, indeed, sounds reasonable, for the father had the first claim in nature. Christ, however, must have the first claim in the new life; and it was a question of life and death. As one has said, the Lord was putting in His claim for the life He had given, a life that demanded that Christ and His claims should be first. The man puts the claims of the dead first, as he says, "Let me first bury my father." The Lord is not denying or setting aside the claims of nature, but He is asserting His own paramount claims. The man did not see that if the Lord calls, His claims must be first, and that the One who calls can at the same time care for the father that is left behind.

Finally, we learn that natural affection may become a real hindrance in the service of the Lord (vv. 61-62). This man also volunteers to follow the Lord, but he first desires to go and bid them farewell at home. This, however natural, indicates to the Lord’s all-searching gaze, that his heart lingered in the home. He would fain put his hand to the plough — engage in service — but his heart was "looking back" to the home, and we go the way that we look. How impossible for the labourer to plough his furrow while walking one way and looking another. The service of the Lord demands an undivided heart.

Thus we are warned that nature may become a real hindrance in the service of the Lord. It is not that the Lord sets aside the mercy of a dwelling place on earth, the claims and duties connected with natural relationships, or the affections that belong to these relationships, but He puts His

claims first, and looks for a devotedness that surrenders all to Him. Thus only will the disciples be "fit for the Kingdom of God." This last word of the Lord brings us back to the Mount where the disciples had seen the Kingdom of God in its glory (v. 27). It is only in the light of the glory of Christ in the Kingdom of God, and in the power of the grace of Christ in the Plain, that we shall be able to refuse the flesh in its varied forms, the selfishness of our hearts, and the claims of nature.

HAMILTON SMITH

S. The Gospel of John

The Gospel of John

Introduction The Gospel of John is pre-eminently the gospel of the revelation of the glory of the Son. Other gospels present other glories of our Lord: Matthew unfolds His official glory as the Messiah; Mark presents the glory of His humiliation as the Servant; Luke presents His moral glory as the Son of Man; but John's high privilege is to present His personal glory as the Son.

Moreover, the presentation of Christ as a divine Person involves the revelation of every divine Person. The gospel opens with the presentation of the glories of the Son. As it proceeds, we have the revelation of the Father's heart (John 1:18), the Father's hand (John 5:17), and the Father's house (John 14:1-3). As it draws to its close there is a very full presentation of the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, in this gospel there is the introduction of an entirely new Man after a new order. The Lord speaks of Himself as "the Son of Man which is in heaven" (John 3:13); as the Son of Man "which cometh down from heaven" (John 6:33; John 6:50); and as the Son of Man Who is about to "ascend up where He was before" (John 6:62). Thus in the gospel there is the twofold presentation of Christ: first, as the only-begotten Son revealing the Father; and then as the Son of Man presenting a new order of man — a Man Who walked on earth, and lived in heaven. To bring out these varied glories of Christ, different figures are used. In chapter ii He is the temple wherein dwells the glory of God. In chapter 4: He is the true bread given from heaven to satisfy the need of man. In John 8:1-59 and John 9:1-41 He is the Light of the world to bring men out of darkness. In John 10:1-42 He is the Shepherd to lead His sheep out of the old Jewish fold into the new Christian flock. In John 11:1-57 He is the Resurrection and the Life to deliver men from death. In John 12:1-50 He is the Corn of Wheat that dies to secure a seed His like. In John 15:1-27 He is the true Vine to enable His disciples to bear fruit for the Father.

Seeing that the great purpose of the gospel is to present the glory of the Son of God as a divine Person, it will be readily understood why there is no genealogy in this gospel, and no account of the birth and early years of the Lord. These details, so precious to faith, and beautiful and necessary in their place, would be entirely out of keeping with a gospel that presents the glory of His Person as the Son. As a divine Person He is above all genealogies, even as the Servant, in the Gospel of Mark, He takes a place below the need of a genealogy.

Furthermore, in the presentation of the Word become flesh, no details are given that connect Christ with earth and the nation of Israel. It forms no part of the purpose of this gospel to show the fulfilment of promises made in the past, to foretell the setting up of the kingdom in the future, or to instruct us as to the form the kingdom takes in the present. Again, let us remember, these truths are needed and precious in their place, though falling far short of the great purpose of John in presenting the glory of the Son of God. With the coming of the Son of God, and the consequent revelation of divine Persons and a new order of man, there is the setting aside of the old Jewish order and the introduction of Christianity. From the outset of the gospel both the nation of Israel

and the world at large are viewed as having entirely broken down in responsibility, and as set aside in judgment to bring in Christianity. Further, the gospel sets forth Christianity according to the thought of God, and not according to the corruptions of Christendom; for, be it remembered, the gospel was probably written at a late date when the ruin, fore-told by the apostle Paul, had already overtaken the Christian profession. Thus, in this gospel, we are lifted above the world, and carried outside Judaism and corrupt Christendom, to learn the blessedness of Christianity according to God's thought, founded upon the Person of the Son of God.

Christianity, being founded upon the Person of Christ, must of necessity take its character from Christ — "as the heavenly (One), such also the heavenly (ones)." In chapter after chapter we see this setting aside of the old order, and the introduction of that which is entirely new. In chapter 1 the law given by Moses gives way to "grace and truth" which came by Jesus Christ. In John 2:1-25 the temple at Jerusalem is set aside by the temple of His body. In John 3:1-36 "earthly things" give place to "heavenly things". In John 4:1-54 the natural water of the well is superseded by the fountain of the water of life. In John 5:1-47 the pool and the providential activity of the angel are set aside by the all-powerful voice of the Son of God. In chapter 6 the natural bread gives place to the true bread that comes down from heaven. In John 8:1-59 and John 9:1-41 darkness is dispelled by light. In chapter 10 the Jewish fold is set aside by the Christian flock. In John 11:1-57 death is set aside by life.

We are thus permitted to see old things pass away, and all things become new. Time gives place to eternity, things earthly to things heavenly. In thought we are carried back into an eternity when time was not; in spirit we are taken beyond the bounds of earth to taste the joys of the Father's house.

How blessed, when all has broken down in the hands of men, to come to this gospel and have our souls engaged with divine Persons in Whom there can be no break down, to be led into the purpose of God which no ruin can touch, and to be transported into scenes where no failure of man will ever enter. As we read this gospel we are, from the outset, in touch with eternal things and heavenly scenes, and find ourselves in company with divine Persons. And yet we can move easily in such high company without fear, for this glorious Person, the eternal Son, has drawn so near to us that He can sit beside a lonely sinner at the well, and bring a disciple to rest upon His bosom. So truly has He dwelt among us that to one He can make Himself beholden for a drink of water; to others He can stoop to wash their feet; while yet for others He can prepare a fire to warm them and a meal to feed them. The Eternal Word

John 1:1-18. The great theme of the introductory verses of the Gospel of John is the glory of the Person of Christ as the eternal Word. We are first carried back in thought into eternity to learn His glory as a divine Person; coming into time, there is displayed before us His glory as the Creator; finally, the Word is presented as becoming flesh, revealing to us His glory as the eternal Son in relationship with the Father.

(John 1:1-2). The gospel opens with the sublime statement, "In the beginning was the Word." At once our thoughts are carried back into eternity, before time commenced or creation existed, to learn that the glorious Person Who is called "the Word" had no beginning. In the beginning of everything that had a beginning, the Word was, not "began". "'In the beginning was the Word' is the formal expression that the Word had no beginning" (J.N.D.). At once we are told that the Word

is an eternal Person. As the Word, this blessed Person is the revealer of God — the Person in the Godhead Who is in Himself, as well as by His acts and what He became, the expression of God and His thoughts.

Further, we are told that the Word was "with God". Not only is the Word an eternal Person, He is also a distinct Person in the Godhead. The "with" denotes, moreover, not only distinctness of Person, but also intercommunion between the Persons in the Godhead. Then we are told that "the Word was God." The opening statement, telling us that the Word is an eternal Person, would imply that He must be a divine Person. But we are not left, in a matter that touches the glory of His Person, to an inference, however correct. We are definitely told that "the Word was God" — a divine Person.

Finally, we learn, "The same was in the beginning with God." This is no mere repetition of the fact already stated that He was a distinct Person with God. Here we learn the additional truth that He was eternally a distinct Person. Thus carefully does the Spirit of God guard the glory of His Person against those who might admit the distinctness of His Person and yet assert that there was a time when He commenced to have a distinct Personal existence.

Both the Lord, referring to the commencement of His ministry, and John, speaking of the commencement of Christianity, use the expression "from the beginning". Here in reference to that which has no commencement we twice have the expression, "in the beginning". Further, it is to be noted that it is said that "the Word was with God" — not the Father. As the Word and God, so the Son and the Father are correlative. The designation God comprehends not only the Father but also the Holy Ghost and the Son. The Word and God speak of the nature of divine Persons: the Father and the Son tell of relationships between divine Persons. The great object of these verses is to establish the glory of Christ as in nature a divine Person. In the fewest and plainest words the Spirit of God in these opening verses has presented the Godhead glory of our Lord. The Word is an eternal Person, a distinct Person in the Godhead, a divine Person, and an eternally distinct Person.

All the bright array of "heavenly things" that pass before us in this gospel are founded upon the glory of the Person of Christ. To call in question the Deity of the Son is to undermine the foundation on which all blessing for man is based. It matters not what elaborate religious systems men may build or how much they may profess to honour the Name of Christ, if they are not building on this foundation all will come to ruin.

(John 1:3). The glory of the Word as a divine Person having been stated, we pass from eternity into time to learn the two great ways in which God has been expressed through the Word: first, in creation (verse 3), and secondly, by incarnation (verse 14). Here, then, we learn that "all things were made by Him" — the Word. This positive affirmation is emphasised by the negative statement that "without Him was not anything made that was made." All things, great and small, animate and inanimate, spiritual and material — everything that has "received being" (N. Tn.) received it through the Word. The very form of words necessarily exclude divine Persons, of Whom it can be said that They have being, but not that They "received being". If creation comes into being, it is not only to prove there is a Creator, but in order, in its measure, to express the Creator. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth His handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge" (Psalms 19:1-2; Romans

1:20).

(John 1:4). If verse 3 speaks of that which received being through the Word, verse 4 tells us of that which is in the Word. "n Him was life." With this statement we pass from the relation of the Word to the whole created universe to consider His relation to mankind. Thus the "life" spoken of can hardly be the natural life of creation. Truly, as the Creator, the Word is the source of the natural life, which, when given, whether in plants or animals, can propagate itself. This life is rather the spiritual life which becomes the light of men who already have the natural life. Life may be communicated to others, but life was never communicated to the Word — "In Him was life." This life was the light of men. The Lord can say, "He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). The life in the Word was the perfect revelation to man of the invisible God. The light of nature will not reveal the heart of God. The light of reason cannot find out God by searching. It is only the light of the life in the Word become flesh that can declare God.

(John 1:5). Man is fallen; if, therefore, the light shines before men, it is in a scene of darkness or ignorance of God. Further, we learn that "the darkness comprehended it not." This tells us that spiritual darkness is not only ignorance or absence of light; it is opposition to the light. Natural light would banish actual darkness; but, if man is left to himself, spiritual light will not banish his spiritual darkness. The light of the life of the Word brings out the moral incapacity of man, as later the love of His life calls forth the hatred of man.

(John 1:6-9). In the opening verses there is passed before us the glory of the Word in relation to God, then to creation, and lastly to mankind. In the verses that follow we learn the way God has taken to present the light to man in this world. Not only does God give the light, but He sends a forerunner to call man’s attention to the light. No details are given of John the Baptist’s connection with the Jew or things earthly. Here he is viewed as "sent from God," and as a witness to that which is entirely new — the Light. In other gospels he witnesses to the King and His kingdom for repentant Israel: here he witnesses to the Light for "all men".

If, however, God sends the forerunner, He carefully guards the glory of Christ. Great as John may be, there is only One Who is the Light. John, indeed, was "the burning and shining lamp" (John 5:35, N.Tn.), but the Word was the Light that coming into the world lightens every man. The Light had a twofold effect: it exposed man, but revealed God. Truly the Lord "went about doing good," but the motive in all that He did was to make God known. He did not simply open blind eyes to relieve blindness, but to make known the love of God in relation to man’s need. Light is the revelation of God in love according to the full truth of man’s condition and God’s holiness.

(John 1:10-11). Then we are told the effect of the Light upon man when left to himself. The world did not know Him, and His own, the Jews, would not receive Him. The Light reveals that man is not only utterly insensible to what is good and perfect, but absolutely opposed to the One in Whom all this goodness is displayed. Left to himself the condition of man is hopeless.

(John 1:12-13). God, in His sovereign grace, does not leave man entirely to himself. He works in grace in man, with the result that some receive Christ — they believe on His Name — and to such are given the right to become the children of God. They form a new race, not by natural generation — of blood; nor by their own efforts — the will of the flesh; nor by the will of others — the will of man; but as deriving a new life from God.

Incarnation. (John 1:14-18). The first thirteen verses unfold the glories of the Person of the Christ. He is the Word, an eternal, distinct, and divine Person in the Godhead; He is the Creator of all things, the One in Whom is life, and the Light of every man.

(John 1:14). Now we are told how this glorious Person came into this world to bring the light of life to men. The One Who in the beginning was the Word becomes flesh. We have learnt Who He is in Person, Who He was in eternity; now we are told what He becomes in time. It is not said that He became the Word by incarnation, but that the Word became flesh. This immense event — the incarnation of the everlasting Word — would lead us to expect great and blessed results. Three of the outstanding effects of incarnation are brought before us in these verses: first, the revelation of the eternal relationships between divine Persons; secondly, the attitude of God toward man; thirdly, the declaration of God in His fulness. The eternal relationships between divine Persons. The Word having become flesh, the apostle can say, "We have contemplated His glory, a glory as of an only-begotten with a Father". The glory they beheld was not derived from the Manhood He assumed but from His relationship in the Godhead. His glory was a unique glory, the glory of an only-begotten Son, a relationship enjoyed in communion with God as a Father. Thus, while the reality of His Manhood is stated, the glory of His Person is carefully guarded. The attitude of God towards man. The Word having become flesh, we at once learn what is in the heart of God toward man. The One Who became flesh dwelt among us "full of grace and truth". He came in a character that exactly suited man. He did not come making demands from man, as in the law, but as a Giver bringing blessing in grace to the unworthy. Moreover, the full truth came with Christ. All that Moses and the prophets stated was true, but not the full truth. The law tells me what I ought to be; it does not tell me what I am. "Christ showed not what things ought to be, but what they are . . . . Christ tells me the truth about everything, evil and good alike" (J.N.D.).

(John 1:15). The witness of John the Baptist to this glorious Person come in flesh is again given. The One Who is full of grace and truth takes a far greater place in time, even as He existed before John in eternity.

(John 1:16-17). Moreover, the Word become flesh, and dwelling among us, not only set forth the fulness of grace that was in Christ, but, says the apostle, "Of His fulness we all have received, and grace upon grace" (N.Tn.). He was here not only to display grace in Himself, but to communicate grace to others, and that in abundance — grace upon grace. The law given by Moses was an exactor, demanding from man what he ought to be in relation to God and his neighbour. Grace, coming by Jesus Christ, brings blessing to man according to what he is in all his need, while fully maintaining the truth of all that God is in all His infinite holiness.

(John 1:18). The declaration of God. The Word having become flesh, there is at once the full declaration of God. In Old Testament days there were partial declarations of God in His attributes — as the Almighty and as the unchanging Jehovah — but there was no revelation of the heart of God until the Son came. No man was great enough to declare God. None but a divine Person could reveal a divine Person. "No one has seen God at any time." The Son, as the only-begotten in the bosom of the Father, revealed the Father as He knew Him. As one has said, this not only describes "the character of His glory here below; it is what He was (what He had been, what He ever is) in the Father’s own bosom in the Godhead: and it is thus He declared Him."

H. Smith.

S. The Heavenly Calling.

The Heavenly Calling.

Hamilton Smith.

(Extracted from Scripture Truth Vol. 47, 1980-2, pages 1-4.) "Holy Brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling" (Hebrews 3:1)

It is deeply important to realise that, as believers in the Lord Jesus, we are not only saved from judgment, but we are called to heaven- "partakers of the heavenly calling". The Apostle does not exhort us to partake of the heavenly calling; he says we are partakers. The believer is as much a heavenly man as he is a saved man. But we have with shame to own that our conduct is not always becoming to heavenly men, any more than it is always consistent with being saved men.

We gladly own that our salvation is not "of works", but, "By grace ye are saved through faith" (Ephesians 2:8-9). In like manner we partake of the heavenly calling, not by "our works", but, by His grace. So we read, "God hath saved us and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace (

2 Timothy 1:9). Our walk and ways neither secure our salvation, nor make us a heavenly people; but the fact that we are saved, and partake of the heavenly calling, will greatly effect our walk and ways. The common thought even in evangelical Christendom is that the Gospel relieves us from our guilt, and then sets us up on earth as better men, and better citizens, in improved circumstances, and finally takes us to heaven where we die. There seems to be little appreciation of the great truth that Christianity takes us completely out of the world, gives us a new place in heaven, and thus makes us strangers and pilgrims on earth.

Turning from what we see in Christendom to learn from Scripture God’s own thoughts, we shall find that the grace of God, Firstly, meets our needs as sinners, and relieves us of our guilt and judgment;

Secondly, it brings us under a new power by which we are cared for and kept waiting for the coming of the One that has saved us;

Thirdly, it connects us with our new place in heaven so that even now, while yet on earth, we are partakers of the heavenly calling. When we turn to the Gospel of Luke, it is deeply instructive to trace in the different incidents how grace in the Person of Christ has visited us from on high, reached down to us in all our depth of need to lift us into the heights from which grace came, and thus makes the sinner that believes a partaker of the heavenly calling.

(1) The forgiveness of sins (Luke 7:37-38, Luke 7:48, Luke 7:50). In the first chapter of the Gospel, Zacharias, in his hymn of praise, so beautifully can say, "The dayspring from on high hath visited us". With the coming of Jesus the new day of grace had dawned upon the world. In the fourth chapter we learn how the Lord opened this day of grace as He quotes the prophecy of Isaiah

foretelling the coming of the Lord to preach the Gospel to the poor and to heal the broken-hearted. Then the Lord can say, "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears". In the seventh chapter we find this grace reaching down to a poor degraded sinner and forgiving her sins. "A woman in the city which was a sinner" finds herself in the presence of the Saviour. She realises that she is in the presence of One who knows all her sins and yet is full of grace toward her. The result is, her heart is broken and her heart is won. Her tears speak of a broken heart, and her kisses of a heart that is won. At once the Lord in His grace binds up her broken heart by saying, "Thy sins are forgiven . . . thy faith hath saved thee, go in peace". Here then is the start of all our blessing. We are not forgiven because of anything that we have done, but because of what Christ has done, and we know we are forgiven, as the woman knew that she was forgiven, not because we believe that we are forgiven but because God says so. "In Him all that believe are justified from all things." This is indeed a great blessing, but, in the case of the woman the blessing hardly goes beyond the forgiveness of sins.

(2) Carried and cared for (Luke 10:33-35). In this fine scene we see a further stage in the blessings that grace brings to us. The Good Samaritan binds up the wounds of the dying man; as we may say, he receives the forgiveness of sins. But he receives further blessings. His wounds having been bound up, the Good Samaritan set the man on "his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him". And, passing on his way, he leaves a message to say that he is coming again for him. So with believers, when forgiven we are not left to find our way through this world as best we can. We are carried in the power of the One who has forgiven us; we are brought to an inn; as we may say, we are made strangers in this world, we are cared for every step of the way, and the One that has blessed us and cares for us, is coming for us. But in all this, though there is a great advance upon the truth of forgiveness there is nothing about heaven.

(3) Heaven opened to us (Luke 14:16-23). In this passage we have a great advance upon the truth brought before us in Luke 10:1-42. There we found ourselves cared for as pilgrims in this world. Here, in this beautiful picture, we learn that we are called into an entirely new scene. The supper takes place in the house and the invitation is, "Come, for all things are now ready". Not only ’Come to Christ’, however true and necessary. Here the invitation is to come into a new place-the Father’s house. The invitation is, "Come"; the servant is instructed to "bring in hither"; and again the word is, "Compel them to come in". The great object is that the house "may be filled".

Thus God tells us that He has opened His house and disclosed the desire of His heart to have His house filled with sinners saved by grace. Cast out of Paradise on earth, man has become a homeless wanderer in this world’s highways and hedges, but the grace of God can reach down to man in all his misery to bring him into the warmth and joy of the Father’s house.

(4) Sinners brought home to heaven (Luke 15:4-6). Here we have a further advance on Luke 14:1-35. There we see the Father’s house thrown open, and sinners invited to "Come". Here we see in picture lost sinners saved and brought into the home. We find the Good Shepherd going after the lost sheep. But what for? Is it simply to save the sheep? He does indeed seek and save the sheep; but He does more. He picks it up and carries it on His shoulders. But is this all? He does indeed save, and carry, and care for the sheep; but He does more; He brings it home; thus we read, "When He cometh home". What end had the shepherd before him when He went out into that lonely wilderness? Was it simply to find a wandering sheep and bring it back to the fold from

whence it had strayed? Ah no! He found it, picked it up and He carried it, and He brought it home. Nothing less than His home will do for His sheep.

Then in the story of the prodigal son we see how grace can reach a sinner in all the misery and want into which his sin has plunged him in the far country, to bring him into all the nearness and joy of the Father's home.

Finally, in the case of the thief, brought before us in Luke 23:43, we see an actual case of one who was taken from the depths of sin to the height of paradise. The first word the Lord uttered to this man was, "Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise". We might have thought that surely the first word that the Lord would say would be, "Thy sins are forgiven". Ah no! the Lord's first word to this believer was to let him know that heaven was opened to him, that he was fitted for heaven and called to heaven-a partaker of the heavenly calling. Such is the efficacy of the death of Christ that the vilest sinner that believes in Him can be taken into heaven with Christ.

Why are we partakers of the heavenly calling? These incidents very blessedly tell us that grace comes down to us from on high, meets our deepest need, and lifts us to the height from whence grace came, to be with Christ in heaven. But these passages tell us more; they tell us why we are called to heaven. Does God set us before Him in heaven simply to make us happy? Truly we shall be happy, for in His presence there is fulness of joy. But, if He brings us there it is not simply for the joy of our hearts, but for the gratification of His own heart. When the Shepherd picked up the sheep, it is true that he rayed it on his shoulders rejoicing; but His joy was not complete until he had brought the sheep into His own home. Then, He says, "Rejoice with Me". So with the Father; His love and compassion were expressed outside the house; but it is not until we pass within the house that we hear of the Father's joy. Then we read, "They began to be merry". This wonderful story tells us that such is the love of the Father's heart that He actually desires our company. That is why He has called us to heaven and made us partakers of the heavenly calling. The practical effect of the heavenly calling (Hebrews 11:13-16). What, we may ask, will be the practical effect on our walk and ways of heartily embracing the great truth that we are partakers of the heavenly calling? Do we not see the practice that flows from faith in this great truth livingly set before us in the history of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, as recorded in Hebrews 11:13-16? In Abraham we see one who was "called to go out into a place which he should after receive". He had the promise of "a better country, that is, an heavenly". Together with Isaac and Jacob, they saw by faith this heavenly country "afar off", and heartily embraced the promise of this country. The result was:-

Firstly, they became "strangers and pilgrims on the earth". They saw the King in His beauty and the land that is very far off. And their links with the heavenly city severed their ties with earth.

Secondly, being strangers and pilgrims they became true witnesses for God in this world, as we read. "They that say such things declare plainly". It was not simply what they said with their lips; it was their lives that spoke to the world around.

Thirdly, declaring "plainly", as true witnesses, they escaped the snares of the enemy who sought to draw them back into the world by giving them opportunities to return.

Fourthly, taking the place of strangers and pilgrims, declaring plainly that they seek a country, and refusing every opportunity to turn back to the world, "God is not ashamed to be called their God".

What a wonderful example we have, then, in these Old Testament worthies! In a far more direct way the heavenly calling has been opened to us since Christ has come to tell us of heavenly things. Christ has died to secure heaven for us and to fit us for heaven. We are called to heaven and made partakers of the heavenly calling. But we may well challenge our hearts by asking ourselves, Have we heartily embraced the heavenly calling? Have we confessed, in our words and ways and walk, that we are "strangers and pilgrims on the earth"? Have we declared plainly as witnesses for God that we seek a country and that our hopes are in another world? Have we refused every opportunity to return to this present world? As we look at Christendom we cannot but see how the great profession has entirely failed to enter into the heavenly calling of Christianity. But what of the true people of God in the midst of the profession? And in particular, what of ourselves? What is the truth as to each one individually? Have we not each one to challenge our own hearts and ask ourselves: have we so embraced the heavenly calling, and walked in consistency with it, that at last God will be able to say of us, as He said of the patriarchs of old:- "God is not ashamed to be called their God"?

S. The Hope.

The Hope.

Hamilton Smith.

(Extracted from Scripture Truth, Volume 22, 1930, page 250.) "Look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh."-

Luke 21:28.

There is a world beyond this world of sight, No eye hath seen, nor heart of man conceived, For those who in the Saviour have believed: A home of everlasting love and light; A day of joy, that ends the long dark night; A rich reward, for those who suffered loss; The Lord’s "Well done," for those who bore their cross; The victor’s crown for those who fought the fight.

Then art thou faint and weary by the way?

Lift up thy head, and hear the Master say, "I am the Morning Star, the hope of dawn, I quickly come, to call on high My own, From shades of night, into the cloudless morn, To see Me face to face, and know as known."

S. The Lamb of God.

The Lamb of God.

Hamilton Smith.

Extracted from Scripture Truth magazine Volume 9, 1917, page 257.

"Redeemed . . . with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world." (1 Peter 1:19). In these words the Spirit of God carries us back into eternity to open the wonderful story of the Lamb. Christ, as the Lamb of God, was no afterthought with God, He "verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world." And no sooner had sin come into the world than the story of the Lamb was taken up in time. Abel, though dead these thousand years, still speaks of the necessity of the sacrifice of the Lamb. In offering to God the firstlings of his flock he reveals that first great truth, which every poor sinner coming to God must learn, that "without shedding of blood is no remission."

Abraham continues the story of the Lamb in that great scene in which his faith was proved (Genesis 22:1-24). God says as it were, "I am going to bring into display the faith which I have long known to be in Abraham's heart. He has been justified before Me by faith, he shall now be justified by works which shall prove the reality of his faith in Me" (James 2:21). Surely never man was tested like Abraham: Job was tested with the loss of children, possessions and health, but Abraham's test was deeper. Job was required to submit to a loss; Abraham was required to make a sacrifice. One was passive submission, the other active obedience. And how great the demand: "Take now thy son"; and yet deeper the sword pierces his soul, for it must be "thine only son"; and deeper still, for it must be "Isaac," the one on whom all the promises depend; and yet deepest of all, for it must be one "whom thou lovest." But there was more in this great scene than the testing of Abraham's faith. Precious as that was, there was something still more precious, more instructive, important, and soul-moving. Wrapt up in this story is the far greater story of the Father and the Son, of God and the Lamb, of Christ and the cross. Abel tells us there must be a lamb for a burnt offering; Isaac raises the question, "WHERE IS THE LAMB?" And Abraham gives the only possible answer, "GOD WILL PROVIDE HIMSELF A LAMB FOR A BURNT OFFERING." No lamb of man's providing could avail to meet the holiness of God or the sin of man. God must provide the Lamb, and, says Abraham, "God will provide Himself a Lamb."

Moses next takes up the story of the Lamb. He tells the character of the One who alone can meet the claims of God. The Lamb of God's providing will be a holy spotless victim, a lamb "without blemish" (Exodus 12:5).

Isaiah completes the Old Testament story of the Lamb. He tells us the manner in which God's Lamb must accomplish his work. He must be an unresisting, willing victim, for, says the prophet, "He is brought as a Lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb so he openeth not his mouth" (Isaiah 53:7).

Passing to the New Testament we leave shadows and types and prophecies behind and find ourselves in the presence of the One who is the very image of the shadows. John the Baptist opens the story of the Lamb, as recorded in the first chapter of the Gospel of John. Abraham looking forward had said, "God will provide Himself a Lamb," and John, "looking upon Jesus as He walked," answers back across the ages, "Behold the Lamb of God." If the message came to Abraham, "Take now thy son," it was but a foreshadowing of Jesus declared to be the Son of God (34). Did God say to Abraham "thine only son"? so now we hear the Spirit of God declaring Jesus to be "THE ONLY BEGOTTEN SON"(18). Had Abraham to offer up Isaac, the child of promise? so Jesus is declared to be "THE CHRIST," the One in whom all the promises are yea and amen (41): and lastly did Abraham hear those words, "Take now thy son . . . whom thou lovest"? so Jesus is presented as the "SON WHICH IS IN THE BOSOM OF THE FATHER" (18).

If John answers to Abraham and presents before us the Lamb in His humiliation, Philip and Peter answer to Moses and Isaiah and present the Lamb in His sufferings. Philip finds the eunuch reading Isaiah's great prophecy, "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and like a lamb dumb before his shearers, so openeth he not his mouth," and beginning at the same scripture he "preached Jesus" (Acts 8:1-40). Peter reminds us that we are redeemed "with the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:19). The Apostle John in Revelation 5:1-14 continues the story of the Lamb, presenting before us the Lamb in His glories. Leaving earth behind John is carried in spirit into heaven, and there he beholds in the right hand of God a book of judgment, but also of blessing reached through judgment. But who can open the book? And if none can open the book how can the judgments take their course? How can the blessings be reached? How can the evil be set aside and the kingdom glories be established?" Who is worthy to open the book?" is the question addressed to the assembled hosts of heaven. Searching through all the myriads of the redeemed John could find "no man in heaven" worthy to open the book. Many great saints were there, Enoch who walked with God, and Abraham who talked with God, Moses who was buried by God, and Elijah who was caught up by God — all are there, but none are worthy to open the book. And then John searches through earth, but if he can find no man in heaven, little wonder that he can find no man on earth, and still less that he finds no one under the earth that is worthy to open the book or to look thereon. Thereupon John falls to weeping. But weeping will not do for heaven. On earth weeping may endure for a night, in hell weeping will endure for eternity, but in heaven "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying." John is the only man that ever wept in heaven, and though he wept much he was not allowed to weep long. He hears one of the elders saying, "Weep not: behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, hath prevailed to open the book." And John, who had been so busy looking through heaven and earth, and under the earth, that he had quite overlooked the throne, now turns to the throne expecting to see the all-prevailing Lion, and "lo in the midst of the throne and the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain." The Lion that prevails is the Lamb that was slain. On earth John had heard the words, "Behold the Lamb of God." He had followed the Lamb in His humiliation. He had stood at the foot of the cross and been a witness of the Lamb in His sufferings. He had seen Him when men pierced His hands and feet at the place of the three crosses, "where they crucified Him, and two others with Him, on either side one and Jesus in the midst"; he had seen Jesus as the risen Man on the evening of the resurrection day when Jesus came and "stood in the midst" and showed His disciples the wound marks in His hands and feet; and now,

transported to heaven, thronged with the vast host of the redeemed, and ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands of angels — in the very centre of heavenly glory — he sees "in the midst of the throne . . . a Lamb as it had been slain." He sees the Lamb in His glories — JESUS with the wound marks in His hands and feet, the only Man in all that eternal glory who will bear any trace of the sorrows of time. And as John gazes with adoring wonder, he hears the great host of the redeemed break forth into song — the new song — the song of the Lamb, saying, "THOU ART WORTHY TO TAKE THE BOOK, AND TO OPEN THE SEALS THEREOF: FOR THOU WAST SLAIN, AND HAST REDEEMED US TO GOD BY THY BLOOD OUT OF EVERY KINDRED, AND TONGUE, AND PEOPLE, AND NATION." The angels cannot sing this song, neither can they keep silent when it is sung, and so John hears a fresh burst of praise in which all heaven joins — the living creatures, the blood-bought saints, the "innumerable company of angels" — all join as with a loud voice they cry, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." But earth cannot remain silent when heaven is telling the glories of the Lamb, and so there falls upon John's ears a fresh burst of praise. This time all created beings in heaven and earth join in one great anthem of praise to God and the Lamb, saying, "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." The four living creatures add their "Amen" to this threefold burst of praise, and the blood-bought saints, with hearts filled to overflowing "fall down and worship Him that liveth for ever and ever." But in the course of the book of the Revelation further glories of the Lamb pass before us. The scene now changes from heaven to earth and we are permitted to see the Lamb in His power and in His wrath, executing judgment. As He had redeemed His saints by blood, so now He redeems the inheritance by power. It is the Lamb that opens the seals and forthwith judgment takes its course (Revelation 6:1); it is before the wrath of the Lamb the nations cry out in terror (Revelation 6:16); and it is against the Lamb that the nations, under the leadership of the beast, make war only to be overcome, and to discover that the Lamb of God, — the One they had despised and nailed to a cross, and crowned with a crown of thorns, — is the Lord of lords and King of kings (Revelation 17:14). But once again the scene changes from earth to heaven, and in chapter nineteen we are permitted to see fresh glories of the Lamb. On earth that vile system which had so long borne the name of the Lamb, and so long denied the character of the Lamb, has at last been judged, and heaven rejoices over its destruction. But the destruction of the false professing church on earth makes way for the presentation to Christ in glory of the true church. The judgment of the great whore leads to the marriage of the Lamb. In this great scene there passes before us the bride, the Lamb's wife (Revelation 19:8 and Revelation 21:9), the marriage of the Lamb (7), and the supper of the Lamb (9). The bride presents the church as the object of Christ's intimate love. As such He loved it and gave Himself for it. As such He has in tender love nourished it and cherished it all the days of the wilderness journey. Weak, failing, persecuted, scattered and broken as the church may be, yet never has it ceased to be the object of His love and affection. Through flood and flame and persecution Christ has brought His bride, ever having in view the great day of the marriage of the Lamb; for espousals, however sweet to the affections, will not satisfy the heart. The intimacy of love between the bride and the Lamb is precious, but love is not content without the possession of its loved object. And while the bride speaks indeed of love, the marriage speaks of the possession of the object of love. Says the Apostle, "I have espoused you to one husband ": but with what end in view?" That I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2). The espousals

have in view the presentation — the day of the marriage of the Lamb. The love that has borne with the church in its wilderness journey, that' has sanctified and cleansed it, has held on its way in view of the marriage of the Lamb. Having loved His own which were in the world He loved them unto the end, and that end, "that He might present it to Himself a glorious church not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing." And when the marriage takes place the supper will begin. If the bride speaks of the intimacy of love, and the marriage of the possession of the object of love, the supper of the Lamb proclaims the delight and joy with which heaven will celebrate the marriage of the Lamb.

One more scene remains and earth again takes up the tale to tell these further glories of the Lamb. In heaven we have seen the marriage of the Lamb; but the Lamb is not content to possess His bride, He will display His bride before the world. John is carried to a great and high mountain to see the bride, the Lamb's wife, but what he actually sees is "that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God." A symbol, surely, of the church displayed in glory, but, above all, the glory of the Lamb displayed in the church, for above and beyond the glories of the city John sees the glories of the Lamb. He tells of its jasper walls great and high, he speaks of its gates of pearls, the streets of gold, and the foundations garnished with all manner of precious stones — and all this is exceedingly beautiful, but we ask, "Is this all?" And John as it were answers back, "Oh, no, I can tell you more, I can tell you the things that are not there, I saw no temple, no sun, no moon, no candle, no night, no evil, and no curse." And again we say this is very blessed, but is there nothing more?" Indeed there is," John seems to say, "for in the midst of all the glories, and above all the glories of this celestial city, I saw the Lamb. The One well known to us in the days of His pilgrim journey, the One who walked with us, and talked with us, who dwelt among us full of grace and truth, who shared with us our poverty, who bore with us in our weakness, and wept with us in our sorrows, the One who loved us and gave Himself for us — this is the One I saw in the midst of the city — the Lamb of God, "And the Lamb is the light thereof." How indeed would the gold and the pearls and the precious stones display their beauty apart from the light?" The Lamb is the light thereof." The glories of the city may captivate our minds, the absence of all evil will surely satisfy the conscience, but the presence of the Lamb will alone satisfy our affections, and make every saint at home in the midst of these transcendent glories. We shall see the glories of the city, we shall see the river of life and the tree of life, but above all we shall see the Lamb, we shall "see His face," and His name shall be in our foreheads. May the transforming power of the story of the Lamb be manifest in our lives even now.

"The bride eyes not her garment, But her dear bridegroom's face;

I will not gaze at glory, But on my King of Grace — Not at the crown He giveth, But on His pierced hand: The Lamb is all the glory Of Immanuel's land."

S. The Last Days.

The Last Days.

Hamilton Smith (From An Outline of Sound Words, Vol. 4.) 2 Timothy 3:1-17. The instruction of the third chapter of the Second Epistle to Timothy demands our careful study for therein we have on the one hand, warnings as to the solemn condition of Christendom in the last days, while, on the other hand, we are instructed as to our resources, so that the believer may live according to God in spite of the evil.

It is an immense mercy that we are not left to form our own judgment as to the condition of Christendom, nor to follow our own thoughts as to how we should walk in these last days. We have the mind of God, both as to the evil, and as to the path God would have us to tread in the presence of the evil. In the first nine verses of this chapter we have a solemn picture of the terrible condition of Christendom as seen by God at the close of the Church period. In verses 10 to 17, we have a clear unfolding of the mind of God for His people in these difficult times. To understand the instruction of the chapter it is necessary to observe the connection with the chapters that precede and follow. In 2 Timothy 1:1-18 and 2 Timothy 2:1-26, we have the mind of the Lord for His people in the Apostle's day, when the corruption of the Christian profession had already commenced. In the second chapter the Apostle likens the House of God to a great house in which vessels to dishonour are found in association with vessels to honour. The Apostle instructs the individual believer how to act in the presence of this corruption. He presses three great truths; first, separation from iniquity and vessels to dishonour; secondly, following righteousness, faith, love, and peace, with those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart; thirdly, to do so in a right spirit, marked by gentleness, patience and meekness. It is only as we individually answer to these instructions that we shall be able to understand and profit by the solemn truths of 2 Timothy 3:1-17. In this chapter the Apostle looks beyond the day in which he lived to the last days in which our lot is cast, to show the development of the evil which had already commenced in his day. Having set forth the development of the corruption of Christendom, and the resources of the godly in the midst of the corruption, in 2 Timothy 4:1-22, he encourages the servant of the Lord to continue his work for the Lord however evil the day.

1. THE EVIL OF THE LAST DAYS (Vv. 1 to 9). The chapter naturally opens with a solemn picture of the evils of the last days, for, unless we see the true condition of Christendom, we shall hardly appreciate the instruction that God has given to enable the believer to rise above the evil. In reading these verses we do well to remember that the terrible condition portrayed is not a description of Heathendom, nor of Judaism, but of Christendom. This condition is marked by four outstanding characteristics:-

First (Vv. 1-4); we are warned that in the last days the mass who compose the great Christian profession will be marked by uncontrolled selfishness, leading to every form of evil and self-indulgence. The solemn description commences with the statement that "men shall be lovers of their own selves." Hence they covet for self, boast in self are proud of themselves, and are

impatient of every form of restraint upon self, human or divine. They indulge self according to their own evil lusts and are lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

Secondly (v. 5); men will seek to cover the evil condition of the Christian profession with the cloak of sanctity. They will affect the form of piety. They will retain outward religious forms while living a life of selfish indulgence that plainly shows they know nothing of the spiritual power of a new life. From this great lifeless profession we are definitely told to "turn away."

Thirdly (Vv. 6, 7); the last days will be marked by the diffusion of error working by the underhanded methods of men who "creep into houses" and appeal to the emotions and lusts of those ignorant of the truth.

Fourthly; the truth will be resisted by imitation. The magicians of Egypt, who withstood Moses, set forth the character and methods of these opposers. Jannes and Jambres sought to resist the testimony of God, not by a denial of the truth, but by imitation. They endeavoured to show that their power, though avowedly derived from another source, was as great as the power of God, and that they could produce results equal to those produced by the word of God through Moses. What Moses did by the word of the LORD they "did in like manner with their enchantments" (Exodus 7:11, Exodus 7:22; Exodus 8:7). But their folly was exposed.

They could produce remarkable results but they could not give life. When they attempted to produce life, we read, "They could not" (Exodus 8:18). This then is the terrible condition of the Christian profession in these last difficult days. We are warned that all the worst feelings of the human heart will be linked with the profession of Christianity, and every form of wickedness will cover itself with the outward form of godliness.

Moreover, we are faced with a number of religious cults professing to be Christian, such as Christian Science, Christadelphianism, and the Oxford Group Movement, which do not, like infidelity, deny the truth, but, none the less resist the truth by imitation. They seek to imitate the new Christian life, which is the result of the grace of God, by changing and reforming the old life as the result of human efforts. They may indeed, deceive the unwary by producing a changed life, but it is only the old life reformed and not the new life of Christ. The leaders of these evil cults are exposed by the word of God as "men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith."

These then are the evils that constitute the last days; perilous, or "difficult," times for the believer. Nevertheless, as the remainder of the chapter will show, God has made full provision that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works in an evil day.

2. INSTRUCTION FOR THE MAN OF GOD IN THE LAST DAYS (Vv. 10-17). With verse 10 we pass on to learn the rich provision that God has made in order that the believer may escape the evils of Christendom in the last days. To this end there is set before us:- First, Paul’s doctrine, or "teaching;"

Secondly, Paul’s manner of life Thirdly, the Lord, Himself Fourthly, continuance in the things we have learned; and Fifthly, the Holy Scriptures.

(a) PAUL’S DOCTRINE (v. 10). If we are to escape the evils of Christendom, we must be established in Paul’s doctrine. The Apostle can say of Timothy, "Thou hast fully known my doctrine." It is no mere vague or partial acquaintance that will suffice: we need to be "thoroughly

acquainted" with Paul’s doctrine (N. Tn.).

Paul’s doctrine unfolds to us in the fullest way the glad tidings concerning God’s Son Jesus Christ to a world of sinners. But we do well to remember that the gospel revealed to Paul, and preached to the world, included a great deal more than is generally proclaimed in Evangelical circles. He not only proclaimed the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ, but also the entire setting aside of the man that committed the sins. Paul’s doctrine was not a reformation of the "old man" and a mere change of life; he preached the judgment, and setting aside, of the old man in death, and the introduction of an entirely new life-Christ. Moreover, Paul’s doctrine delivers us from the world: he preached that Christ "gave Himself for our sins that He might deliver us from this present evil world" (Galatians 1:4).

It is manifest, then, that Paul’s doctrine exposes the corruption of the last days. Christendom retains and indulges the old man under the cover of a Christian profession. It may seek to produce a change of life, but it is apart from Christ and the grace of God, and, moreover leaves people in the world. It is an effort to make the old man respectable, and the evil world a better and a brighter place. Christianity, as unfolded in Paul’s doctrine, brings us to Christ-a New Man in a New world.

Further, Paul’s doctrine embraces the whole truth of the Church. Not only does his teaching proclaim God’s grace to the sinner, through Christ, but it also reveals to us God’s purpose for believers as united to Christ to form His body -the Church. One great snare of these last days is the effort to lead believers to rest content with the knowledge of salvation while ignoring their privileges and responsibilities as forming part of the Church of God-to make everything of that which meets man’s need while remaining utterly indifferent to that which is dearest to the heart of Christ.

(b) PAUL’S MANNER OF LIFE (Vv. 10, 11). If the devil cannot prevent us from having the light of Paul’s doctrine he will seek to mar the manner of life so that the doctrine is brought into contempt by the inconsistency of the life. If we are to escape this evil of the last days we shall not only need Paul’s doctrine but, we must heed his manner of life. Very blessedly, the Apostle sets before us the character of this life. Inwardly it is a life marked by "purpose, faith, longsuffering, love and patience." Outwardly it is marked by persecutions and afflictions.

Too often our lives are not characterised by any definite purpose, or that purpose is far short of Christ. The Apostle was a man of purpose. He could say "For me to live is Christ;" and he says, "One thing I do . . . I pursue looking towards the goal for the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus." Moreover, his life was marked by "faith." How many there are that take the outside path without faith for the path, so that when trouble or difficulty arises, they become a source of weakness or give up the path altogether. In answer to the call of God, Abraham went out by faith. Lot, too, went out of the Land of Ur, but he went out with Abraham. Though he was a just man he had no faith for the path, and when the test came he turned aside. Again, "longsuffering" marked the Apostle’s life. Like His Master he met reproaches, slights and insults, in silent longsuffering. Nevertheless, love was behind the longsuffering. His was not the silence of haughty contempt, but rather the silence of love that grieved over the evildoer. Moreover, his life was marked by endurance. In spite of persecution and afflictions he endured, like Moses of old, "as seeing Him who is invisible" (Hebrews 11:27).

(c) THE LORD (v. 11). In the presence of the evil of the last days, we have not only the doctrine of Christianity ac revealed through Paul, and the manner of life, consistent with the doctrine, set forth in the Apostle, but we have the Lord, Himself, to support us. Again the Apostle refers to his own experience. of the Lord's delivering grace to encourage us in turning to the Lord. Whatever persecutions he had to meet, whatever afflictions he was called to endure, he could say "out of them all the Lord delivered me." In the next chapter, he can say, "The Lord stood with me and strengthened me" (17); again, looking on to what remained of his path down here, he said, "The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom" (18).

If we are to fully know Paul's doctrine, and live the manner of life consistent with the doctrine in the face of every kind of opposition and even persecution, we shall need the sustaining grace of the Lord. Let us not think we can hold the doctrine, and live the life, apart from Christ. To the disciples the Lord has to say, "Without Me ye can do nothing." The enemy is strong and we are weak, but the Apostle found that the Lord's grace was sufficient to enable him to meet all the power of the enemy arrayed against him, and that the Lord's "strength is made perfect in weakness." Thus he can add, "When I am weak? then am I strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

We need to be conscious of our weakness in order to be continually cast upon the Lord.

(d) CONTINUE THOU IN THE THINGS WHICH THOU HAST LEARNED" (v. 14). In a day of abounding evil and confusion, there is always the danger of growing disheartened and giving up the truth and abandoning the life that answers to the truth. The Lord's word to Philadelphia is' "Hold fast." Here we are exhorted to "Continue"-to continue in Paul's doctrine, to continue in the life consistent with the doctrine, to continue cleaving to the Lord, and thus continue in the things we have learned.

Let us remember that throughout the history of the Church the great truths, that can be summed up by the Apostle as "My doctrine," have been obscured if not entirely ignored and forgotten. But, in these last days there has been a gracious recovery of the truth. Moreover, this recovery of the truth immediately entails conflict, for the great effort of the enemy will ever be to mar any testimony to Christ by robbing us of the truth. This he will seek to do by using many specious pleas in order to draw us back into associations that are contrary to Paul's doctrine. If we allow ourselves to be enticed into forming links with any religious associations short of the truth we shall most certainly lose the truth, abandon the separate path of faith, and settle down in the corrupt worldly religious profession. Hence the need of the word, "Continue thou in those things which thou hast learned, and of which thou hast been fully persuaded, knowing of whom thou hast learned them."

Why, we may ask, do we find believers suddenly give up some great truth that they have long professed? Is it not because they have not learned truth from an inspired source. They accepted the truth simply on the word of some teacher It was not held in simple faith in God's word Thus they are not "fully persuaded" of the truth.

(e) THE SCRIPTURES (Vv. 15-17). The final safeguard against all the evils of Christendom, in these last days, will be found in clinging to the inspiration and sufficiency of Holy Scripture. There we have the truth presented in a permanent form, guarded from error by inspiration, and presented with divine authority. The Apostle sets before us the great gain of the Scriptures. First, they are able to make us "wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." Secondly, having

directed us to Christ so that we find in Him salvation, we shall further learn that "every Scripture" is "profitable for the believer, inasmuch as in the law of Moses. the Prophets, and the Psalms, we shall discover things concerning Christ (Luke 24:27, Luke 24:44). Furthermore we shall find how profitable the Scriptures are for "conviction." Alas! we may be blind to our own faults, and so filled with our own self-importance, that we are deaf to remonstrances from others; but, if subject to the word, we shall find that Scripture brings conviction, for it is "living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword . . . a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Moreover the Scriptures not only convict, they also correct, and, having corrected, they will instruct us in the way that is right. Having then the inspired Scriptures it is possible for the man of God to be fully established in the truth in the, presence of abounding error, and to be "fully fitted to every good work" in an evil day.

If then these are the great truths which will enable us to escape the evils of the last days, and to live the life that becomes the man of God, we may be sure that these are the truths that the devil will oppose. His first snare will be to endeavour to make us content with a partial knowledge of the doctrine, instead of earnestly seeking to become "fully acquainted" with the truth.

If, however, he cannot prevent us laying hold of the doctrine his next snare will be to seek to mar the "manner of life," and thus bring the doctrine into disrepute.

Further he will seek to persuade us that we can hold the doctrine and live the life in our own strength, and thus practically do without the Lord.

Moreover, he will seek by the difficulties of the way to lead us to give up the truth and the path of separation consistent with the truth, instead of continuing in the things which we have learned.

Lastly he will seek to undermine the authority of the Scriptures by leading us to hold truths on the authority of some teacher, even if he cannot get us to question the inspiration of Scripture. H. S.

Chapter 63

S. The Last Message

The Last Message The Word of the Lord by Malachi

Hamilton Smith

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1. The Condition of the People. The prophet Malachi has the solemn duty of delivering God’s last message to His earthly people before the coming of Christ. The message having been delivered, God speaks no more for a period of four hundred years. Then at length the silence is broken by the voice of one crying in the wilderness, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight."

Last words possess a special power by which they often reach the conscience, touch the heart, and linger in the memory. If this be so with men’s poor words, how much more when towards the end of a dispensation God speaks a last word! And as we read the prophet Malachi we do well to let it speak to us with all the power of a last word from God.

Let us first consider the circumstances under which the book was written, for, however truly it may have an application to God’s people in these last days, we must not forget to whom in the first instance it was addressed. The prophecy opens with the words: "The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel." It is a message, therefore, to God’s chosen earthly people. Yet while all Israel may thus be included in the scope of the prophecy, it is actually addressed only to the small part (often called "the remnant") delivered from the captivity of Babylon. As we learn from other parts of Scripture, while the great mass of the people were still in captivity, some sixty thousand, in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, had been allowed to return to the land of their fathers, rebuild the Temple, revive the sacrifices, build the walls and set up the gates of. Jerusalem.

God’s people, therefore, at that time, were divided into two main classes, and it will be helpful to notice the broad distinctions between them.

There was (1) the mass of the nation in Babylonia, in captivity. They were not in Palestine where God had placed them, but in Babylonia, whither their sin had brought them. They were not freemen as God by His power and goodness had made them, but slaves to a foreign overlord. Clearly therefore the mass of the nation may be rightly described as in a wrong position, because not in the place or state purposed for them by God. But they were clearly in a wrong condition also, for they were content to remain in this wrong position when the opportunity, the invitation to leave it was vouchsafed (see Ezra 1:3).

Then there was (2) the band of returned Israelites dwelling in their own land and engaged in the religious rites and exercises originally ordained for them by God. Of these, unlike their captive brethren, it may be said they were in a right position, as being in the place and carrying on the religious system purposed for them by God. But, as of those in Babylonia, so of these in Jerusalem, it must be said they were in a wrong condition, for the book of Malachi throughout is an exposure of their moral and spiritual failure while outwardly characterised by formal orthodoxy.

Again, in both of these great classes were to be found (3) individuals in happy contrast with their surroundings; men marked by practical nearness, faithfulness and devotedness to God. Daniel and his friends may be cited as examples amongst those of the Captivity, while Ezra, Nehemiah and the pious few referred to in Malachi 3:16 will serve to indicate those of a similar stamp among the returned " remnant."

Such, in a few words, were the circumstances and characteristics of the nation in the Malachi period. Now, although the prophecy opens with the words, "The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel," it was clearly only to the remnant in the land of Palestine that this, God’s last message, was actually addressed. We find allusions to the Temple, to the sacrifices, to the priests, to tithes, etc., all features perfectly natural to Jerusalem and Canaan, but which could not have been descriptive of those in exile.

What was the burden of the word of the Lord to this returned remnant? It was no longer a denunciation of idolatry, as in the days of the Kings; it was not an appeal to return to the Land, as in the days of Ezra; nor was it an appeal to rebuild the Temple, as in the days of Haggai, or even to rebuild the walls, as in the days of Nehemiah. Idolatry had been given up; the remnant were back in the Land; the Temple was rebuilt, and the round of religious observances was being conducted with the semblance of outward order. Though outwardly, however, in a right position, with a correct ritual, nevertheless their moral state was entirely wrong. And thus the burden of the Lord, in this last message, mainly consists in a solemn appeal to the conscience of the remnant as to their low state morally and spiritually.

Here let us pause. Bearing in mind what we have seen to be the setting of the book and its characteristic message, let us consider the position and condition of the Church of God to-day, with a view to applying thereto the spiritual lessons which the prophecy of Malachi would suggest. In doing so we shall be compelled to own that there are found conditions, among the people of God at the present time, that correspond in a striking way to these different conditions found at the close of the past dispensation. As we survey Christendom are we not compelled in the first place to own that the mass of Christians are held captive in unscriptural, not to say apostate religious systems, just as Israel was held nationally in the captivity of idolatrous Babylon? And hence of the great mass of Christendom it has to be said that they are in a wrong position, as tested by the purpose of God for them revealed in His Word. Further, a truthful observer would be compelled to state that not only is Christendom generally in a wrong position, it is also in a wrong moral condition. Of this the address to Laodicea in Revelation 3:14-17 is a sad proof and testimony. Christendom as a whole, therefore, corresponds strikingly with Israel in Babylon during the Malachi period.

If now we carry our survey of Christendom back to the beginning of last century, we are bound to recognise a very distinct work of God, whereby a remnant of His heavenly people (like that of His

earthly nation in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah) were delivered from these unscriptural religious systems of men in which they had been held captive. Set free from sectarianism they were by His grace enabled to recover the true ground upon which it is God's purpose that all His people should stand, and thus, like their Jewish prototypes, were once more in a right position. As time went on, however, while still professedly in the true path of the Church's calling, failure and declension has more and more marked their course, so that to-day God has a solemn controversy with these delivered saints as to their wrong moral condition. Their ecclesiastical position may still be right, but their moral and spiritual condition is not in accord with the position they have taken. This class, then, closely corresponds with the restored remnant in the Land.

Yet again, to continue the parallel, in both of these classes there has always been found many a devoted servant of God whose moral and spiritual condition has been of a very high order, and whose course has been well pleasing to the Lord.

Now just as the prophecy of Malachi has chiefly in view the restored remnant in the Land, outwardly orthodox but inwardly offensive to God, together with an exquisite word of encouragement for the faithful individuals found amongst them, so, we believe, it makes a special appeal to-day to the feeble and failing remnant of saints gathered out of the ecclesiastical captivity of Christendom, together with the faithful individuals found in the midst of this company. And just as in Malachi's day the last message to the people, before the coming of the Lord, was given to arouse the conscience as to their condition, so to-day, on the eve of the coming of the Lord, we believe that God's last message to His people is a solemn appeal to awaken conscience as to our moral and spiritual condition; so that there may be found on the earth those who are suited to the One who is coming, and who, with quickened affections, can say, "Come, Lord Jesus."

Having seen that the prophecy is addressed to the returned remnant, and that its burden concerns their condition, we shall do well to carefully enquire, What is this condition, and how far does it depict the condition of God's people to-day?

1st. They were marked by high profession but low practice (Malachi 1:6). They professed that Jehovah was their Father and their Master, but in practice they did not render to Jehovah the honour due to a father, nor the fear that was due to a master. And must we not own to-day that our practice has fallen far below our profession? In our daily life and walk do we honour the Lord? Do we think and speak and act in the fear of the Lord? But showing neither honour nor fear exposed the remnant to the further charge of despising the name of the Lord. To this charge they immediately reply, "Wherein have we despised Thy name?" A solemn response to a solemn charge, and one which brings to light another sad feature of their condition —

2nd. They were marked by spiritual blindness to their own low state. Spiritual blindness is the inevitable result of a high profession and a low walk. The people of God are prone, almost unconsciously, to excuse low walk because of their high profession. We may say, "With all our failure we have the light, and we are in the right position"; and thus our very profession may become the means of blinding our eyes to the seriousness of our low practice. So that when faced with our failure we either palliate it, refuse to face it, or, like the remnant, profess we cannot see it.

3rd. The outward service of the Lord was continued, but the true inward motive for the service was lacking (Malachi 1:7-10). They brought their offerings to the altar, or table of the Lord; they kindled

the fire on the altar, and they opened and shut the doors of the temple. But no one would shut the doors for nought. Love of self, and not love to the Lord, was the motive for their service. The result was that, in the service of the Lord, anything would do. The lame and the sick would do for the Lord. Not so would they dare to treat their earthly ruler. Men had a greater place in their eyes than the Lord, and to give them such a place was treating the Lord with contempt. If they treated their ruler thus, would he be pleased with them? And now, says the Lord, "I have no pleasure in you" (verse 10). Viewing them in the light of His purpose the Lord can say, "I have loved you" (verse 2); viewing them in the light of their practice He has to say, "I have no pleasure in you" (verse 10). How solemn when the Lord has to say of those He loves, "I have no pleasure in you." Has all this no voice for us? May not we, too, continue the outward service of the Lord — preaching, teaching, pastoring, etc. — and yet the true motive be lacking? The service outwardly correct, the motives inwardly corrupt? If we compare the church at, Ephesus (Revelation 2:2) with the church at Thessalonica do we not see this exemplified? The church at Ephesus was busy in the service of the Lord, but the true hidden motive was lacking. The church at Thessalonica was marked by "works of faith," "labour of love," and "patience of hope." The church at Ephesus was also marked by "works," and "labour," and "patience," but "faith," and "love," and "hope" are lacking, and therefore the Lord has to say to this church, "Thou art fallen." We may well ask are "faith," and "love," and "hope" the springs of our service? — qualities which only the Lord can discern, and which are very precious in His sight. Or is the motive for service self in some form — self-exaltation, self-advancement, or the hope of gain?

4th. The service of the Lord became a weariness to the remnant (verse 13). Profession without practice, and service without devotedness, will lead to weariness in the things of the Lord, and what people are weary of they will end by despising. Thus the remnant not only said of the Lord’s service, "Behold, what a weariness is it!" but they "puffed" at it (verse 13, New Translation). Alas! can we not see in our day this same weariness in the things of the Lord? Are there not many who were once active in the service of the Lord, but who have now grown weary? Possibly their practice fell below their preaching, then the preaching was continued when the devotedness was gone, and now at last they have grown weary. The hands hang down and the knees are feeble; the hands never lifted up in supplication, the knees never bent in prayer. They have grown weary — weary of prayer, weary of reading the Bible, weary of remembering the Lord, weary of preaching the gospel, and weary of hearing it, weary of the Lord’s things, and weary of the Lord’s people. And what we weary of we despise; little wonder, then, that they end by puffing at the Lord’s things and the Lord’s people. How deeply important to have Christ ever before us, the true motive for all service — to "consider Him," the Leader and Completer of faith, "that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds."

This, then, is the solemn picture portrayed by the prophet of the general condition into which the mass of the returned remnant had fallen. (1) High profession and low practice; (2) moral insensibility and spiritual blindness; (3) outwardly serving the Lord without devotedness to the Lord; and (4) weariness and contempt for the service of the Lord. Does it not behove us to seriously challenge ourselves as to how far this is a true picture of our own condition?

2. The Condition of the Leaders.

We have already seen that God’s last message to the returned remnant, before the coming of the Lord, concerned their moral and spiritual condition. We have also briefly reviewed the general charges brought against the mass of the remnant, revealing their low condition. But, beside these general charges against all, this last message contains particular charges against the priests, or leaders of the people. These charges are brought before us in the second chapter of the prophet Malachi.

Before briefly looking at these charges, we do well to pay attention to the solemn way in which the chapter opens — "If ye will not hear and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto My name, saith the Lord of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings." When God speaks to His people as to their moral and spiritual state, the least they can do is to hear, and lay to heart, what God may have to say. People who refuse to hear, when God speaks, are indeed in a hopeless case, be they saints or sinners. Refusal to hear brings down the chastening hand of the Lord upon His people. Their blessings are withered up. And may we not ask, How stands the case with God’s people to-day? Have we not to confess that while the condition of God’s people is low, yet the most solemn and ominous sign of decay is that, in spite of repeated warnings, and though the Lord’s hand is upon His people in chastening, there seems little evidence that they "hear" and "lay it to heart"? Have we given the prophets a hearing? Teachers who instruct our minds we are ready enough to follow, but the prophet who speaks to the conscience we neglect or reject. Professing Christians may "heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears," but they will "stone the prophets" who warn them of their sins. And if there is no "hearing" the prophet, there will be no "laying to heart" the message that he brings. On every hand we are face to face with the low condition of God’s people. The divisions, the contentions, the bitterness amongst His people are manifest on all sides. And yet how little are they laid to heart; how little mourning before the Lord; how little confession to one another; how little do we lay to heart the sorrow and shame to ourselves, and the dishonour to the Lord. We seem a great deal more anxious to prove that we are right than to own that we are wrong. And must we not recognise that, as a result, the Lord’s hand is upon His people in chastening? Thus there is much preaching, and little blessing amongst sinners; much ministry, and little progress amongst saints. The blessing is very largely withheld.

Remembering the solemn warnings of these introductory verses, may we have grace to "hear" and "lay to heart" this last message to the leaders of Israel, and hear therein a voice that speaks to ourselves with no uncertain sound.

First the prophet presents a beautiful picture of the priesthood as established by God in the beginning. We can only get a true estimate of our condition in the end of a dispensation by comparing it with the condition at the beginning. Thus only shall we learn the extent of our departure from what is according to the mind of God. In the beginning the priest was marked by (1) life, (2) peace, (3) the fear of the Lord, (4) the law of truth in his mouth, (5) iniquity not found in his lips, (6) a walk with God in peace and equity, and (7) blessing to others — turning them from iniquity and instructing them in knowledge. Such is the mind of the Lord for the one who is " the messenger of the Lord of hosts" in this dark world (verses 5-7). In the light of this beautiful picture the prophet proceeds to unfold the then condition of those who professed to be "the messengers of the Lord," and in doing so he brings five distinct charges against them.

1st. They were wrong in their relations to the Lord. "Ye are departed out of the way," says the prophet (verse 8). In the beginning the priest "feared Me" and "walked with Me," said the Lord. But now they had departed out of the way of life and peace, with the solemn result that, instead of turning many from iniquity, they "caused many to stumble" and brought themselves into contempt in the eyes of the people (verses 8 and 9).

2nd. They were wrong in their relations with one another. "Why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother?" enquires the prophet. Can we not supply the answer? Because they were wrong in their relations with the Lord. As one has said, "Satan first divided men from God, and then one man from another." The prophet seeks to correct this evil by reminding them that they have one Father and one God. And in our own day it is only as we view the people of God as one, — children in one family of which God is the Father, and members of one body of which Christ is the Head, — that we shall be able to deal faithfully with one another. But alas! departure from the Lord has been followed by contention, strife, bitterness, and unfaithfulness with one another.

3rd. They were wrong in their relations with the world. "Judah hath dealt treacherously . . . and hath married the daughter of a strange god" (verse 11). From this point the charges become more general. It is no longer exclusively the priests that are addressed, but Judah is now included in the common charge of worldliness, showing itself by worldly alliances of the most intimate character. But while all are involved in this charge, it is connected with the failure of the priests. The order of these charges is solemn and instructive. First the leaders were wrong with the Lord — they departed out of the way. Then they dealt unfaithfully with one another. And lastly, while the shepherds were wrangling the sheep were wandering. The contentions of the leaders allowed the people of God to drift into the world and form unholy associations.

4th. They were wrong in their family relations. They are charged with dealing treacherously (or "unfaithfully") with their wives (verse 14). If we are wrong with God we shall be wrong in every other relationship. If we form unholy alliances with the world, it will not be long before we follow the unholy practices of the world in the most intimate relationships of life. In order to counteract this the prophet reminds them of the oneness of the marriage relationship, so that amongst His people there should be found "a godly seed." How deeply important this principle. If the children are to be holy, let the parents be holy.

5th. They were wrong in their dealings in discipline. They dealt treacherously against their wives, putting them away on trivial pretences. But, says the prophet, "the Lord, the God of Israel, saith that He hateth putting away" (verse 16). Amongst the remnant, however, it was far otherwise, for we read, "One covereth violence with his garment." Under the garb of maintaining order they acted with the greatest violence. While this passage is directly concerned with men wrongfully putting away their wives, the principle is capable of wider application. It may well be considered in connection with "putting away" an offender from amongst the company of God’s people, and is a solemn warning against violently getting rid of a brother without adequate and scriptural grounds.

Amongst the remnant men put away their wives, not for sin, but to gratify their own selfish interests. And, alas! amongst the people of God have there not been many glaring instances when known godly persons have been put away, not for sin, but simply because the exigencies of a party demanded their exclusion? In reading these solemn charges we cannot but be struck with

the recurrence of the word "treacherously." It occurs in verses 10, 11, 14, 15, and 16. In each case it may be more correctly translated "unfaithfully." Having departed out of the way they were unfaithful in every circle. They were unfaithful every man with his brother; they were unfaithful in relation to the world; they were unfaithful in the domestic circle; and they were unfaithful in their discipline.

What a solemn picture does this last message present of the remnant of God's people, who outwardly occupied a right position and who outwardly were carrying on the Lord's service. And if we are at all intelligent in the things of God, it is only too easy to see amongst the people of God today the counterpart of this remnant. Amongst those to whom much light has been given, is it not true there has been a grave departure "out of the way," and that, too, on the part of many of the leaders? Departure from God has been followed by dissension amongst leaders — unfaithfulness to one another. Jealousy, envy, strife, evil speaking have too often marked leaders in their attitude to one another. This again has been the occasion of many turning aside to the world, and unholy alliances with the world have led to the unholy practices of the world intruding into the family life of God's people. And if we have been wrong in our own homes, little wonder that we have been unable to govern in the house of God. "If a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the Church of God?" (1 Timothy 3:5). Is there not enough in these charges to bring us to our knees in humiliation. confession, and supplication? May we hear therein the voice of God speaking to our consciences, and may we lay this last message to heart.

3. The Door of Repentance.

We have already seen how solemnly the prophet lays bare the low moral condition of the remnant — a condition which brings down the chastening hand of the Lord and cries aloud for judgment.

Accordingly, in Malachi 3:1-18, the remnant are warned of the coming of the Lord in judgment (verses 1-5). Wearied by the confusion which their own folly had wrought, they cry out "Where is the God of judgment?" (Malachi 2:17). And they receive the immediate reply, "Behold, I will send My messenger, and he shall prepare the way before Me: and the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to His temple." "But," the prophet asks, "who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth?" And the Lord Himself adds, "I will come near to you to judgment"; and when the Lord comes He will be a swift witness against evil and evil doers.

Thus the remnant are not only charged with their low condition, but warned as to the judgment it entails. God, however, is not only a God of judgment, He is also a God of mercy, and hence it is ever His way to grant grace for repentance before the judgment falls. Again, all God's dealings, whether in judgment or mercy, are founded upon the immutability of His nature. For this reason we have the formal declaration of the unchanging character of God before the call to repentance. "I am the Lord," we read, "I change not therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (verse 6). God does not change in holiness, and therefore He must chasten His people when they sin. Neither does God change in His purposes of grace and blessing, and therefore His people are not consumed.

Having thus sounded the note of warning, God next, in accordance with His unchanging principles of acting, calls His people to repentance. "Return unto Me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts" (verse 7). Furthermore the Lord encourages them to return, by unfolding the blessings

that will follow repentance. (1) They themselves would be enriched; the windows of heaven would be opened, and blessing, beyond their capacity to retain, would be poured upon them. (2) They would become a witness to the Lord before the world, "All nations shall call you blessed" (verses 7-12). In addition to calling to repentance the Lord also shows the way. It is well to face our low condition, to confess it before the Lord; but occupation with our own evil will not in itself lead to recovery. It is not the badness of man but the goodness of God that leads to repentance (Romans 2:4). This way of recovery lies, we believe, in the appreciation of all that God is for His people as presented, in a threefold way, in the opening chapter of the prophecy: —

1st. The sovereign love of the Lord (Malachi 1:2).

2nd. The settled purpose of the Lord (Malachi 1:5 and Malachi 2:1-17).

3rd. The mighty power of the Lord (Malachi 1:14).

Let us look briefly at these three great truths.

(1) The sovereign love of the Lord. The prophecy opens with the sublime statement, "I have loved you, saith the Lord." This great statement is rich with instruction.

1st. It assures us that whatever the condition of God’s people, His love towards them does not alter. Israel may depart from the Lord, may fall into idolatry, may go into captivity, may be restored and again fall into a low moral condition, but, says Jehovah through the prophet Jeremiah, " I have loved thee with an everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31:3). So, too, disciples may fail, may forsake the Lord, may even deny the Lord, but, "having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end " (John 13:1).

2nd. However solemnly the Lord may have to speak to us as to our moral condition, and however severely He may have to deal with us because of it, behind His rebukes and His chastenings there is love. The hand that smites is moved by a heart that loves.

3rd. The love of the Lord is the true measure of all failure. We can only truly gauge the depth of failure when we measure it by the height of His love. This is true, whether it be the failure of Israel or the failure of the Church; whether it be individual backsliding or general breakdown. I can only estimate my personal failure when viewed in the light of the personal love of the One "who loved me, and gave Himself for me." How black, too, the Church’s history, how great its ruin, when viewed in the light of the great truth that Christ "loved the Church, and gave Himself for it." How contemptible our divisions, our contentions, our bitterness to one another, seeking to put one another in the wrong to exalt ourselves, misconstruing one another’s actions, misinterpreting one another’s words, and seeking to impute evil to one another, after hearing the touching words of the Lord, "I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (John 13:34). What appalling littleness our words and actions often betray when we remember that "Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us" (Ephesians 5:2).

4th. The love of the Lord is not only the measure of our failure, it is also the way of recovery from it. Was it not a look of love that recovered Peter? Peter denies the Lord with oaths and cursing, and the "Lord turned and looked upon Peter." A look, may we not say, of infinite love. Peter discovered by that look that his denial of the Lord had not altered the Lord’s love to him. And Peter went out and wept bitterly. Love broke him down. Our sins broke His heart, but His love breaks our

hearts. How did Joseph dispel the lingering doubts in his erring brethren, who had treated him so shamefully? We read "he comforted them and spake to their hearts" (Genesis 50:21, margin). He confirmed his love to them. And how will Jehovah at last restore his backsliding people? We read in Hosea these touching words of the Lord: "I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness and speak to her heart" (Hosea 2:14, New Translation). In wilderness circumstances God speaks to her heart, opens to her a door of hope, and there, when love has done its work, once again she sings as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt. And may we not say, in these sorrowful days, the Lord is dealing with His people after the same manner? How many mourn the loss of some loved one, whose face they will see no more down here. The wife mourns her husband, the children their father, the mother her son. Thus for many a heart the Lord has turned the world into a wilderness. He has allured us into the wilderness, but, in so doing, He has allured us to Himself, that, in the midst of our tears, He might speak to our hearts, and, as He tells us of His love, bind up our wounds and enable us to sing — With mercy and with judgment My web of time He wove, And aye the dews of sorrow Were lustred with His love. In the light of this great love may we judge our low condition, and, by its constraining power, may we henceforth live not unto ourselves, but unto Him who died for us and rose again.

(2) The unchanging purpose of the Lord. The Lord not only reminds His people of His love, but He would fain recover them by unfolding the purposes of His love. This leads us to the second great truth unfolded by the prophet. We read "The Lord will be magnified from the border of Israel" (verse 5); and again, "From the rising of the sun to the going down of the same My name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto My name, and a pure offering; for My name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts" (verse 11). To the declaration of the Lord’s love the remnant retort, "Wherein hast Thou loved us?" And the Lord meets this spiritual blindness by giving proof of His love. They are taken back to the past and reminded of the sovereign love that chose their father Jacob, and they are led on to the future and shown that love has purposed to make Israel the centre of blessing on the earth. "The Lord will be magnified," but it will be from the "border of Israel." And the accomplishment of this great purpose will make manifest the love of Jehovah. In the prophet’s day they professed they could not see His love. They said, "Wherein hast Thou loved us?" But the Lord replies there is a day coming when you will see, "Your eyes shall see, and ye shall say, The Lord will be magnified beyond the border of Israel." Edom may seek to oppose, but all in vain; Edom will be called "the border of wickedness," but "the Lord will be magnified from the border of Israel." And are we tempted in our day, by reason of the roughness of the way, to call in question the Lord’s love, and again say, "Wherein hast Thou loved us?" Then let us remind our souls once again of the Father’s sovereign love that chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, and of His settled purpose to get glory to Himself in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout the ages of ages. Let not the passing sorrows of time for one moment dim our vision of the love that chose us before time was, and shall bless us eternally when time shall cease to be. The power of Satan, and the intrusion of the flesh and the world, ruined the testimony of God’s ancient people, just as they have ruined the testimony of God’s people to-day. Nevertheless in the end God’s purposes will prevail, whether for the earthly or the heavenly people, and the glorious result will be that "the Lord will be magnified" and His name "shall be great" (verses 5 and 11). We shall be blessed, but He will be magnified. And just as His name will be great among the heathen on earth, so His name will be great among the hosts in heaven. For we read, "His name shall be in their foreheads." Our names may be

written in heaven, but only one Name is seen in heaven.

(3) The mighty tower of the Lord.

What love has purposed power will perform, and so the prophet brings before us the mighty power of the Lord. "I am a great King, saith the Lord of hosts, and My name is to be revered among the heathen" (verse 14). The Lord is great in majesty and great in power. He has at His disposal unnumbered hosts. The chapter opens with the touching announcement, "I have loved you, saith the Lord," and it closes with the sublime statement, "I am a great King, saith the Lord of hosts." Love and power combine to carry out God's purposes.

How solemn the state of the remnant when viewed in the light of the Lord's love for His people, the Lord's purpose to exalt His name and bless His people, and the Lord's power on behalf of His people. So low is their condition that they cannot discern His love, they profane His name, and treat with contempt the One who is " a great King " and " the Lord of hosts." And does not the low condition of God's people to-day stand fully exposed, when viewed in the light of the sovereign love that has chosen them, the high destiny that awaits them, and the exceeding greatness of the power towards them? Does it not behove us to return again to the Lord, and in His presence review our moral and spiritual condition in the light of these great truths, to review the manner of our lives — the inner life and the outer life — the things that hold our affections and engross our thoughts, the words we utter and the spirit in which we utter them, the things we do as well as the motive for doing them? And as we thus make search in the light of His love, and purpose, and power, we shall have to confess that much in our lives looks very poor and mean.

Let us not, however, be discouraged. That by which we measure our failure becomes the means of recovery for those who are exercised thereby. As we dwell upon the love that chose us, the glorious destiny that awaits us, and the mighty power that works in us, we shall be delivered from all that we are and rejoice in all that He is.

4. The Approved of the Lord.

We have seen that in this last message the Lord has a controversy with the people and their leaders, in regard to their low moral and spiritual condition. Further, we have seen that the Lord opens to them a door of repentance, with the promise of immediate blessing if they avail themselves of His way of recovery. The prophecy, however, clearly shows that for the mass of the people there was no hope of recovery. They were morally insensible and spiritually blind. Satisfied with a correct position and the outward performance of religious observances, they were utterly insensible to their low condition, and spiritually blind to all that the Lord was for them. If God reminds them of His love, they say, "Wherein hast Thou loved us?" (Malachi 1:2). If He rebukes them for despising His name, they say, "Wherein have we despised it?" (Malachi 1:6). If He reproaches them with offering polluted bread, they say, "Wherein have we polluted Thee?" (Malachi 1:7). If they are accused of having wearied the Lord, they say, "Wherein have we wearied Him?" (Malachi 2:17). If God charges them with robbery, they say, "Wherein have we robbed Thee?" (Malachi 3:8). If He says, "Your words have been stout against Me," they say, "What have we spoken so much against Thee?" (Malachi 3:13). If He beseeches them to return to Him, they say, "Wherein shall we return?" (Malachi 3:7). A low condition is serious, but the refusal to acknowledge it makes the condition utterly hopeless. This was the terrible case of the remnant in

Malachi’s day. Alas! is it otherwise with the people of God to-day? We cannot suffer those who warn us; as ever, we stone the prophets. How impatient we are with the slightest suggestion that anything may be wrong. As one has said, "The pride of the human heart dislikes to be told of sin; it dislikes still more to own it." How quick we are to condemn others; how slow we are to condemn ourselves. Herein lies the utter hopelessness of any general or corporate recovery today. Satisfied with a correct position, and the outward and orderly observance of religious life, there is the refusal to own that we have done wrong, or that we are wrong. Hence there is no general restoration, no recovery, no healing. But if there is no recovery for the mass, there is every encouragement for the individual. In the history of God’s people the most devoted men of God are found in the darkest days. Samuel "ministered unto the Lord" in the days when the priesthood was defiled, the sacrifice abhorred, and the lamp of God going out. It was not in the palmy days of King Solomon, but in the apostate days of King Ahab, that Elijah bears his bright witness for God. So in the days of Malachi there were those who, amidst the prevailing gloom, were not only outwardly correct, but morally suited to the Lord. They met with the Lord’s approval and commendation as a little remnant within a remnant. The characteristic marks of this little remnant are of a moral order. It is not their outward position, however correct, or their outward service, however zealous, which gains the Lord’s approval. It is their moral condition which He approves, and which makes them precious in His sight. It is not, surely, that the Lord makes light of a right position, or of service to Himself, but in the last stage of His people’s history, when outward testimony is ruined, what the Lord does look for, above all else, is a moral condition suited to Himself. The first distinguishing mark of this remnant is that "they feared the Lord" (Malachi 3:16). This is in striking contrast to the religious mass by which they were surrounded, who, while making a high religious profession, showed only too clearly by their low practice that they had cast off the fear of the Lord. The Lord details many grievous sins that call for judgment, but they are all summed up in this great sin, the people "fear not Me, saith the Lord of hosts" (Malachi 3:5). Looking upon the mass, the Lord has to say, "Where is My fear?" (Malachi 1:6); looking upon this godly remnant, He delights to own that they "feared the Lord" (Malachi 3:16). The man who fears the Lord is governed by the Lord and not by man. He obeys the Lord rather than men. He refers everything to the Lord, and has the Lord before him in all his ways. He allows no man, whatever his position and gift, to come between himself and the Lord. In a word, he gives the Lord His right and supreme place, and this is very precious in the sight of the Lord. The second mark is they "spake often one to another." This is fellowship; but not simply the fellowship of a right position, but rather the fellowship of a right moral condition. It was the fellowship of those who "feared the Lord." The prevailing dishonour to the Lord, and the low moral condition of those by whom they were surrounded, drove them together; on the other hand the soul exercises, and their common fear of the Lord, drew them together in a holy, happy fellowship. In these last days is it not a fellowship of this character that has such value in the eyes of the Lord? Not a fellowship which begins and ends with a correct ecclesiastical position; not an organised fellowship to conduct an evangelical campaign, or to carry out some great missionary enterprise: not a fellowship for the assertion of some great truth, or to raise some fresh testimony; not a fellowship which the world around can recognise, but rather a quiet, hidden fellowship expressed by the happy interchange of thought between souls drawn together by their common links in the Lord. The third mark is they "thought upon His name." They did not seek to magnify their own names, but they sought to maintain the honour of His name. While those around despised the name of the Lord, these godly souls were very jealous for His name.

Such were the characteristics of those who, in a day of ruin, had the Lord’s gracious approval. There was nothing in them that created any stir in the world of their day; they were not marked by any great gift that gave them a prominent place before men; they were not remarkable for any great works of charity that would have earned the world’s applause. They possessed neither striking powers of intellect nor miraculous gifts that would have exalted them amongst their fellows. They had no clearly defined organisation, that would have secured for them a place among the parties and systems of men. Indeed, there was an entire absence of those qualities which are highly esteemed among men, but they possessed those moral traits which, in the sight of the Lord, are of great value. And the Lord was not slow to express His appreciation of those who, in the midst of the prevailing corruption, feared Him and thought upon His name.

First the Lord "hearkened," or, according to a better translation, "The Lord observed it." Unnoticed by the mass around, or if noticed only to be despised, they were not too insignificant to attract the notice of the Lord. He "observed" them, and His eye could rest upon them with delight. The God-fearing walk of this little remnant was of great value in His sight.

Second, the Lord "heard." Not only He observed with delight their godly walk and ways, but, as they held holy intercourse with one another, He was a delighted listener.

Third, "A book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and thought upon His name." They feared the Lord, and the Lord remembered them. They thought upon His name, and He will not forget their names. But it was " before Him " the book was written, not before the world. A God-fearing walk, godly intercourse, godly jealousy for the Lord’s name, these are not the traits that will inscribe a man’s name on the roll of this world’s worthies, it has only a short memory for such. It is to the heart of the Lord that they are dear, He treasures their memory, and inscribes their names in His book of remembrance.

Fourth, "They shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels." Not only did they experience the Lord’s secret approval in a day of ruin, but they will be honoured with His public recognition in the day of glory. In a day of ruin they were indeed precious in His sight — His jewels, though not as yet "made up." In the coming day they will be jewels displayed in a glorious setting. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

Fifth, "I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him." Judgment was about to deal with evil and evil doers, however great their religious profession. This little remnant has the assurance that they will be spared. In the midst of those who professed to be in a special place of nearness to the Lord, and to be serving Him correctly, they had a place truly near to the heart of the Lord, and their service was really acceptable to Him. And so the Lord says, "I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him." Then will be made manifest the difference between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not.

Thus while this last message proclaims, in no uncertain terms, the low condition of the mass of God’s professing people, it as clearly distinguishes individuals marked by moral traits, to whom it brings a message of recognition, of comfort, and of encouragement. Further, not only have they the consciousness of the Lord’s approval as a present thing, to sustain their faith and cheer them on the way, but they have the coming of the Lord as their immediate hope, and as their only hope.

They had no expectation that evil would decrease, or the wicked grow less, or the world grow better, until the coming of the Lord "dealt with the proud and all that do wickedly" (Malachi 4:1).

They looked for no great revival, or general "healing" among God’s people until "the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in His wings" (Malachi 4:2).

They looked for no fresh message from God, nor any further accession of light to relieve the deepening gloom, until the Lord should come, and, as the Sun of Righteousness, dispel the clouds of darkness.

They looked for no revival of miraculous power, nor further public intervention of God on behalf of His people, until the Lord should intervene in His almighty power, enabling them to tread down their enemies under foot (Malachi 4:3).

Surrounded on every hand by a great mass of religious profession boasting in its outwardly correct position, and its orderly round of religious ordinances, and yet withal morally insensible and spiritually blind, these godly individuals, weak, despised, and almost unknown by the world, midst scorn and shame it may be, pursued their lowly and separated path, walking in the fear of the Lord, jealous of the name of the Lord, and waiting for the coming of the Lord. And if we are to get any profit from this last message to God’s ancient people, must we not read it as a last message to ourselves? As stated in the beginning of this meditation, the conditions that prevail in Christendom, and amongst the people of God, in these last solemn days, on the eve of the coming of the Lord, are strangely like the conditions that prevailed in Malachi’s day. Are we not, again, surrounded by a great religious profession? Are there not those who say they are rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing, and yet are morally insensible to their own low condition, and spiritually blind to all that the Lord has for them to meet their deep, deep need? In the midst of this religious profession does not the Lord once again distinguish a few who have His approval, and whose characteristics give them a striking likeness to the godly of Malachi’s day? Concerning them the Lord can say, "Thou hast a little strength, and hast kept My word, and hast not denied My name" (Revelation 3:8). As with the Malachi few, it is not correct outward position, or any great "works" or witness before the world, but rather moral traits which gain for them the approval of the Lord. In a coming day they, too, like their Malachi prototypes, will be displayed in power and glory, and all the world will know that the Lord has loved them. And just as the Malachi remnant will be spared from the coming judgment, so will the Philadelphians be kept from the hour of trial which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Moreover, as the coming of the Lord was the only hope of the godly to whom Malachi prophesied, so the coming of the Lord is the only hope set before the Philadelphians. "Behold," says the Lord, "I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no one take thy crown." In conclusion, may we not say that in these last closing days — these solemn days, these dark and apostate days — God’s last message to His people addresses the conscience and appeals to the heart? It is no longer a message conveying fresh light to the understanding — the light has been given, the truth has been recovered. But the serious question is now raised, "How have we answered to the light; what is our moral condition?" May our consciences be laid bare in the light of this last message. In the presence of God may we so judge ourselves that we may be found amongst those of whom the Lord can say, "Thou hast a little strength, and hast kept My word, and hast not denied My name." Thus indeed shall we truly be looking for the Lord, and as He says, "Surely I come quickly," we

shall be able to reply, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

S. The Last Words.

The Last Words. An Exposition of Chapters 13 to 17 of the Gospel of John

Hamilton Smith

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Preface

It is with no thought of adding to the many critical expositions of this precious portion of Scripture that the following simple exposition has been written. For such a task the writer has neither the necessary scholarship nor ability. The aim has been, rather, to present the reader with a simple and devotional exposition, free from critical questions, trusting that it may prove a spiritual help by promoting prayerful meditation on the Lord’s last words. The title, "The Last Words," has been chosen as being wide enough to include the last prayer as well as the last discourses. In these last words we hear, as one has said, "The voice of Jesus prolonged through all ages, as fresh to-day . . . as it was then in the upper room in Jerusalem. It has a voice intensely human in its tones of sympathy and affection; yet in revelation and authority no less distinctly divine."

If, by this exposition, any child of God is drawn nearer to the One whose voice we hear in the last words, it will not be in vain that it has been written.

John 13:1-38 The Introduction. The opening verse of Chapter 13, is introductory to the last discourses of our Lord. It brings before us the occasion that called forth these farewell words. the need of His own that required them, and the motive that moved the Lord in their utterance. The occasion was that at last "His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father." In the course of our Lord’s earthly path we have heard of other "hours." At Cana of Galilee He could say to His mother, "Mine hour is not yet come" — the hour of His manifestation in glory to

the world. In John 5:1-47 we read, "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" — the hour of His grace to sinners. In the presence of man's enmity we twice read that, "No man laid hands on him, because His hour was not yet come" — the hour of His suffering. This hour — the hour that introduces the farewell words — has another character. It is not the hour of His grace to sinners, nor the hour of His suffering for sinners. Nor is it the hour of His manifestation in glory to the world; it is rather the hour of His return to His glory with the Father, in the love and holiness of the Father's house. The disciples, however, would be left behind in a defiling world that hated the Father and rejected Christ. If then they are to be kept from the evil of the world they are passing through, and yet enjoy communion with Christ in the Father's home of love and holiness, they will need this last gracious ministry with its comfort, its instruction, and its warnings.

Moreover we learn the motive that moved the Lord in this last act of grace, in uttering these farewell words, and in offering up the closing prayer. If the occasion was the departure to the Father, the motive was His love to His own. He is departing out of this world, but there are those left in the world whom the Lord delights to call "His own." They are a company of believers on earth, who belong to Christ in heaven. They are "His own" as the fruit of His own work: they are His own as the gift of the Father. They may be of small account in the eyes of the world, they are very precious in the eyes of the Lord. "Having loved His own . . . He loved them unto the end." He may leave them, but He will not cease to love them. Human love oft-times breaks down. We leave one another, we forget one another, and we lose interest in one another. The prophet tells us, a woman may even forget her child, but says the LORD, "Yet will I not forget thee" (Isaiah 49:15). If the Lord leaves the world, He will not forget His own, nor will He cease to love them. Alas! our hearts may grow scold towards Him, our hands may weary in well doing, our feet may wander; but of this we are assured, that He will never fail us. His love will carry us, and care for us, "unto the end;" and at the end love will receive us into love's eternal home where there are no cold hearts, nor hands that hang down, nor feet that wander.

Thus as we approach the closing scenes of the Lord's sojourn with His disciples, to behold the last act, listen to the last words, and hear the last prayer, we are reminded of the occasion that called forth this closing ministry, the need that required it, and the love that supplied it.

Before entering upon the details of the last discourses, a few suggestive thoughts as to the general character of the truths presented, and the order in which they are unfolded, may be helpful. It will be noticed that in John 13:1-38 the disciples are set in right relations with one another. They are to wash one another's feet and to love one another. In John 14:1-31 they are set in right relations with Divine Persons — the Son, the Father, and the Holy Spirit. In John 15:1-27 they are set in right relations with the Christian circle, in order that they may bear fruit to the Father, and bear witness to Christ in the world from which He is absent. In John 16:1-33 they are instructed in things to come in view of their pathway through a hostile world by which they are hated, misunderstood, and persecuted.

Thus it will be seen in John 13:1-38 the feet of the disciples are washed; in John 14:1-31 their hearts are comforted; in John 15:1-27 their lips are opened in testimony, and in JJohn 16:1-33 their minds are instructed in order that they may not be disheartened by any persecution they may encounter.

Further it will be noticed that there is a progressive character in the instruction. The truth of one chapter prepares for the fresh revelation in the chapter that follows. The service of John 13:1-38 prepares the disciples for the communion with Divine Persons, as set forth in John 14:1-31. Communion with Divine Persons in their own sphere — in the inside place — prepares the disciples to bear fruit, and bear witness in the world — the outside scene — as set forth in John 15:1-27. Moreover the fruit and testimony of John 15:1-27 leads to persecution, for which the Lord prepares the disciples in the truth of John 16:1-33. The unfolding of these great truths to the disciples is not sufficient however to maintain them in this world as the representatives of Christ; he prayer is needed. Thus the discourses to the disciples are closed by the prayer to the Father recorded in John 17:1-26. The feet washing. John 13:1-17 No longer could the Lord be the companion of His disciples in their pilgrimage on earth, yet He will not cease to be their servant in His new place in heaven. Thus. in the scene that follows, described in verses 2 to 17, we have an act of grace which, while closing the Lord’s service of love for His own on earth, fore-shadows His coming service for His own when He takes His new place in glory. If He can no longer have part with us personally in the path of humiliation, He will make it possible for us to have part with Him in His place of glory. This, we judge, is the import of this gracious act of feet-washing. Throughout His perfect life the mind in Christ Jesus was ever to forget self in the service of love for others: and in this last act, though conscious of the dark shadow of the cross, the Lord is still forgetting self in order to serve His own.

Verses 2 and 3 introduce this lowly service by showing, on the one hand, its deep necessity, and on the other hand, the Lord’s perfect ability for the service. The necessity of feet-washing is made manifest in that the disciples will be left in a world in which the devil and the flesh combine in deadly hostility to Christ. The reference to the betrayal of Judas in this opening scene, as also to the denial of Peter a little later, shows clearly that the flesh, whether in sinner or saint, is only material for the devil to use. The unjudged indulgence of the flesh had opened the heart of Judas to the devil’s suggestions. To betray one’s friend, and that too by the token of love, is compulsive even to the natural man; but the overpowering desire to gratify lust, prepares the heart to entertain a suggestion that is foreign to nature, and could only come from the devil. In the presence of this fearful display of the power of the flesh and the devil, the prospect of being left in an evil world, with the flesh within and the devil without, may well appal the heart of the disciples. At once however our hearts are sustained by being directed from the flesh and the devil to Christ and the Father, to learn that "the Father hath given all things" into the hands of Christ. Great power is in the hands of the devil who hates us; but "all power" is in the hands of Christ who loves us. Nor is it only that "all power" had been given to Christ, but He was going to the place of power — He came from God and was going to God.

While feeling with His perfect sensibilities he treachery of a false disciple, and the coming denial of a true one, He, nevertheless, moved on in the calm consciousness that all power was in His hands, and that He was going to the place of power. In like manner He would have us to pass through a world of evil in the consciousness that He has all power and is in the place to exercise the power. Moreover, not only is the Lord in the place of power, with all power, but, in the scene that follows, He will let us know that He delights to use the power on our behalf. The One who has all power in His hands is the One who has all love in His heart. Thus it comes to pass that, moved by a heart of love, the One who has all power in His hands will take into those very hands the

soiled feet of His wayworn disciples. The One who is Lord of all becomes the servant of all.

(Vv. 4, 5). To perform this gracious service "He riseth from supper." He rises from the Passover supper, which speaks of His association with us in Kingdom glories (Luke 22:15-16) to do that which leads to our communion with Him in heavenly glories. In the perfection of His grace He girds Himself for this last act of service, and, pouring the water into a basin, began to wash the disciples' feet and wipe them with a towel wherewith He was girded.

(Vv. 6, 7). "Then cometh He to Simon Peter." If others accept the Lord's service in wondering silence, Peter, impelled by his forceful character, utters all his thoughts. Three times he speaks, each time exposing his ignorance of the Lord's mind. His first utterance deprecates the Lord's lowly service: the second utterance declines it absolutely: the last utterance impulsively submits to the service, but, in a way that would rob it of all its deep significance. Yet, as one has said. "If we are admonished by the mistakes of the disciples much more we are instructed by the answers which correct them." In the Lord's answer we learn the deep spiritual meaning of this last act of service. To Peter it was incomprehensible that the Lord of glory should stoop to wash those wayward feet. Hence his first utterance is one of protest mingled with surprise — "Lord dost Thou wash my feet?" The Lord answers, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." Thus we learn that, at the moment, it was not possible for the disciples to discern the spiritual significance of the Lord's act. Hereafter, when the Spirit has come, all will be made plain. Clearly then we learn that this service was not, as is often said, to teach a lesson in humility by an act of supreme humility on the part of the Lord. There would be no need for Peter to wait for a further day to discern the humility of the act. His very utterances show that the humility of the Lord was uppermost in his thoughts at that moment.

(V. 8). Undeterred by the Lord's answer, which should have warned Peter to be silent until the hereafter of full enlightenment, he now boldly says "Thou shalt never wash my feet." The Lord, in His patient grace, passing over the slight, corrects Peter's impulsiveness by saying, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me." Brief as the answer is, we can see, now that the Spirit has been given, that it presents the spiritual significance of feet-washing. We learn that It symbolises the present service of the Lord whereby He removes from our spirits everything that would hinder part with Him.

Let us note the Lord does not say, part in Me. Precious indeed is the service of feet-washing and yet it would never secure "part in Christ." For this the greater work of the Cross was required, which, once accomplished can never be repeated. By this greater work part in Christ has been for ever secured to every believer. Feet-washing is the symbolic setting forth on earth of a service continued in heaven — a service that enables believers on earth to hold communion with Christ in heaven: for do not the Lord's words "part with Me" signify communion with Himself, in that scene of holy affection in the Father's house? There is, indeed, the blessed fact that the Lord draws near to us and communes with us in our homes, as on the occasion when He entered the house at Emmaus, but part with Him, carries the yet more blessed thought that we can have communion with Him in His home, as was the case with the Emmaus disciples when, on the same night, they found the Lord in the midst of His gathered saints at Jerusalem. Again, do not the Lord's words to the Laodiceans set forth this double truth, when He can say, "If any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me."

Further it would seem that feet-washing is not strictly a symbol of our Lord’s service as the Advocate, nor of His priestly grace, though indeed it partakes of the nature of both. The priestly work of the Lord has in view our infirmities: the advocacy of the Lord deals with actual sins. Feet-washing removes the dullness of soul, and chilling of the affections that may arise in the pursuit of the daily life, and which effectually binder communion with Christ where He is.

Weariness and weakness of body may hinder us from being a witness for Christ here; then the priestly grace of Christ is active to support us in our infirmities. Alas! we may break down and sin, and no longer be fit to witness for Christ; then the Advocate restores the soul. If however the affections have been chilled, though there may be nothing to disturb the conscience, there will be a grave hindrance to communion with Christ, and then the service of feet-washing comes in to remove the hindrance. There is, moreover, the further difference between advocacy and feet-washing, that, whereas advocacy restores our souls in the place where we are, feet-washing restores our spirits to communion with Christ in the place where He is. In the days of Israel’s journeying it was incumbent upon the priests to wash their feet before hey entered the tabernacle. They might indeed have been fit for the people, the camp, and the wilderness, but fitness for the Lord’s presence could only be secured by feet-washing. Hence the laver was before the door of the tabernacle (Exodus 30:17-21; Exodus 40:30-32)

(Vv. 9-11). What then is the nature of the service that is symbolised by feet-washing? The answer to Peter’s first remark has shown that it has a spiritual significance, the answer to his second word tells us the end that it has in view; the answer to his last remark will indicate more clearly the nature, or manner of the service.

Peter, having obtained some glimpse of the blessedness of feet-washing, now goes back on his very determined avowal that the Lord shall never wash his feet. Moved by his real affection for the Lord, and with characteristic impulsiveness he says, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." Whatever ignorance his remark betrays, it certainly expresses an affection which values part with Christ. The Lord replies, "He that is washed all over needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit" (N. Tr.). In Scripture water is often used as a symbol of the cleansing effect of the Word of God. At conversion the Word is applied by the power of the Spirit, producing a thorough change, and imparting a new nature, which entirely alters the thoughts, words, and actions of the believer — a change signified by the Lord’s words "washed all over." There can be no repetition of this great change, but those thus washed all over may oft-times grow dull of spirit. As the travellers’ feet are soiled and wearied by the dust of the road, so the believer, in contact with the daily round, the duties of the home-life, and the pressures of business life, as well as the continual conflict with evil, may often be wearied in spirit and thus hindered from having communion with Christ in His things. It is not that he has done anything that conscience would take account of, calling for confession and the work of the Advocate, but his spirit is wearied and needs to be refreshed, and such refreshment Christ delights to give if we will but put our feet into His hands. Turning to Him He will refresh our souls by presenting Himself before us, in all His perfections, through the Word.

Thus through the Lord’s gracious answers to Peter we learn the spiritual character of this service, the end that it has in view, and the manner of its accomplishment.

Alas! there was one present for whom it would have no meaning: for the Lord has to say, "Ye are clean, but not all. For He knew who should betray Him; therefore said He, ye are not all clean." The betrayer had never been "washed all over." He was unregenerate, and as such would never feel the need, nor know the refreshment of the Lord's gracious service.

(Vv. 12-17). Having finished this service and resumed His seat at the table, the Lord gives us further instruction as to the service of feet-washing. While essentially His own service, yet it is one that He often carries out through the mediation of others. Thus we are put under the obligation, and given the privilege, of washing one another's feet. A blessed service, carried out, not by seeking to correct one another (however necessary at times), still less by finding fault with one another, but by ministering Christ to one another, for only a ministry of Christ will bring refreshment to a wearied soul. Years after the scene in the upper room the Apostle Paul will tell us that one of the qualifications of a godly widow is that she has washed the feet of saints (1 Timothy 5:10). This surely does not imply that she was simply a rebuker of evil, or a corrector of faults, but rather that she refreshed the drooping spirits of the saints by coming from Christ with a ministry of Christ. Did not Onesiphorus wash the feet of the Apostle Paul, for of him the Apostle can write, "He oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain" (2 Timothy 1:16)? Again, did not Philemon carry out this obligation towards his brethren, for to him Paul can say, "The bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother (Philemon 1:7)? Was not the Lord Himself directly carrying out this blessed service when he spoke to His wearied servant Paul by night, saying, be not afraid . . . for I am with thee (Acts 18:9-10)?

Moreover feet-washing not only ministers refreshment to the wearied soul, but rejoices the heart of the one who carries out the service, for the Lord can say, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." The Departure of the Betrayer. John 13:18-30 To receive spiritual communications ever calls for a spiritual condition. Hence feet-washing was a needed preparation for those who were about to listen to the Lord's last words, so rich with divine truth and spiritual comfort. There was one present, however, who had never been washed all over, on whom feet-washing would have no effect, and to whom the teaching of Jesus would have no meaning. The presence of Judas, plotting in his heart the coming betrayal, cast a dark shadow over the little company. Ere the last instructions can be communicated by the Lord, or received by the disciples, Judas must pass from the upper room into the night.

(Vv. 18-20). The way of his removal shows the tender solicitude of the Lord for His own. The treachery of Judas, long known to the Lord is very gently disclosed to His disciples. In the course of the feet-washing the Lord had made allusion to Judas, unnoticed, apparently, by the Eleven. Now He speaks more plainly, saying, "I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen." There was an inner circle of the Lord's chosen companions to whom He was about to disclose the secrets of His heart. But there was one present who had no part in that chosen circle; one of whom the Scripture had said, "He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me. This disclosure might well be a shock to the disciples and a test to their faith. Reasoning unbelief might have argued, "We knew not of the presence of the traitor, but if Jesus knew not, can He indeed be the Lord of glory?" The Lord disposes of such possible reasonings, and supports their faith, by revealing beforehand the coming betrayal. He says, "I will tell you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am." They shall, through the betrayal of Judas, have fresh evidence that He is indeed the great I AM to whom all is known, and to whom the future is

present. On the one hand, the presence and treachery of the betrayer shall not be allowed to cast a slur upon the glory of the Lord; on the other hand, the utter break down of one numbered amongst the twelve shall not invalidate the commission of the remaining Eleven. That commission would remain in all its force, and thus the Lord can say, "He that receiveth whosoever I send receiveth Me; and he that receiveth Me, receiveth Him that sent Me." In the presence of the awful sin of Judas the glory of the Lord is undimmed, and the commission of the Eleven untouched.

(Vv. 21, 22). More, however, is needed to bring home to the disciples the terrible reality of this disclosure, and to remove Judas from their midst. The Lord will tell them plainly the nature of the sin, and finally reveal the man who will commit it. These further disclosures deeply moved the spirit of the Lord. "He was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said. Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray ME." Thus the disciples learn in language that none can mistake, that one of their number is about to betray the Lord. They must face the terrible fact, that the very occasion that a hostile world was seeking — and could not find for fear of the people — would arise from their midst in the person of one who feared neither God nor the people — one who had passed as a disciple of the Lord, had been His daily companion, seen all His works of power, and listened, unmoved, to His words of grace and love.

Such a disclosure troubled the spirit of the Lord and raised the anxious questionings of the disciples as they looked one on another, doubting of whom He spake.

(V. 23). Looking on one another will not solve this solemn question. The traitor is present knowing that he is discovered by the Lord, though betraying no sign that would expose him to others. To the Lord they must turn to find relief from this terrible suspense. The disciple who enquires of the Lord must be one who is near to the Lord. He who is nearest is one who can describe himself as "one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved." Conscious of the Lord’s love to him, and confiding in that love, John is found leaning on the bosom of Jesus. The man whose feet, a little before, had been in the hands of Jesus, now reclines with his head on the bosom of Jesus. May we not say this position of intimate communion is the proper outcome of feet-washing. The head resting on that bosom of love, follows the feet-washing by those hands of love.

(Vv. 24, 25). Simon Peter, the warm-hearted disciple who, so often and in so many ways, seems to say, "I am the disciple that loves the Lord," was hardly near enough to enquire of the Lord. He beckons to John to ask "Who it should be?" Quite simply John asks, "Lord, who is it?"

(V. 26). At once the Lord replies, He it is to whom I shall give the sop, when I have dipped it." Others have pointed out that the force of the Lord’s words is somewhat obscured by the Authorised Version. It is not "a sop" as if it were a mere casual act; but "the sop," referring to a definite custom to give to a favoured guest the specially prepared morsel of the feast. The Lord follows His words by giving the sop to Judas Iscariot, and thus, not only the betrayal is foretold, but the betrayer is exposed.

(V. 27). Already lust had opened the heart of Judas to the devil’s suggestion, now Satan himself takes possession of Judas. If there was any stirring of conscience left in Judas, any sense of shame, any shrinking from the sin he was about to commit, all is silenced with the entrance of Satan. With Satan there is no hesitation, and henceforth Judas becomes the helpless instrument of his designs. For Judas there is now no turning back, and thus the Lord can say to him, "That

thou doest do quickly."

(Vv. 28-30). The Eleven. stunned, as it seems, by this terrible disclosure, fail to grasp the meaning of the Lord’s words. Judas having been entrusted with the bag, they judge the Lord’s words must have some reference to meeting the needs of the feast or to relieving the poor. Judas has no misapprehension. The presence of the Lord has become intolerable to this devil-possessed man, so having received the sop he immediately arises and. without a word. passes into the night, only a little later to pass into a deeper night — that horror of great darkness — from whence there is no return.

It has been remarked that in all this solemn scene there is no denunciation of Judas, no reproach is heaped upon him, no word of expulsion is uttered against him, no demand to depart is given to him. The presence of a false one is revealed; the sin he is about to commit is foretold, the man who will commit it is indicated, and then, amidst a silence more terrible than words, he leaves the light that was too searching, the holy Presence that he no longer could endure, and passes into the night for which no morning will ever dawn. Let us remember that but for the grace of God, and the precious blood of Christ, we should each one follow Judas into the night.

God Glorified in Christ. John 13:31-38 With the passing of Judas the dark shadow, that rested upon the little company, was lifted. The troubled spirit of the Lord was relieved, and the questionings of the disciples were stilled. The words, "When he was gone out" mark this change. Judas had left the light of the Upper Room and passed into the darkness of the outer world. The light inside shines the brighter in his absence, even as the darkness outside is deepened by his presence. The door which closed on the traitor, severed the last link between Christ and the world. The atmosphere is cleared, and, alone with His disciples, the Lord is free to unfold the secrets of His heart.

(Vv. 31, 32). The Lord is departing to be with the Father, His own will be left behind as witnesses for Christ in a world from which He has been rejected. In the course of these last discourses the disciples will be put in touch with Heaven (14); they will be instructed how to bear fruit on earth (15); and they will be strengthened to withstand persecution from the world (16). Such high privileges and honours require a preliminary work on the part of Christ as well as preparation amongst His own. Thus this opening discourse presents God glorified in Christ on earth, Christ glorified as a Man in heaven, and the saints left on earth to glorify Christ. These great truths prepare the way for all subsequent revelations.

All blessing for man, for heaven and earth, throughout eternal ages, rests upon the great foundation truths that come before us in the opening of this discourse. The Lord presents Himself as the Son of Man, and in connection with this title, proclaims three truths of vital importance:

First. "Now is the Son of Man glorified,"

Second, "God is glorified in Him,’’

Third, "God shall glorify Him in Himself."

We may well linger over these great truths seeking to learn something of their deep meaning; for faith’s apprehension of these truths forms the solid basis in the soul for all spiritual growth and blessing. The first great truth is, "Now is the Son of Man glorified." This brings before us the infinite

perfection of the Son of Man — the Saviour. The reference is to the suffering of the Son of Man at the Cross. The statement is that in those sufferings the Son of Man is glorified. To be glorified is to have all the qualities that exalt a person brought into display. At the Cross all the infinite perfections of the Son of Man were displayed in the highest degree. In the eleventh of John we read that the sickness of Lazarus was "for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby."

There the glory of the Son of God was displayed in raising a man from the dead. Here the glory of the Son of Man is seen in going into death. Power over death displays the glory of the Son of God, submission to death the glory of the Son of Man.

Already the Lord had said, in answer to the Gentiles' desire to see Jesus, "The hour is come, that the Son of Man should be glorified." There however the Lord was anticipating the glories of the Kingdom- here He speaks of the deeper glories of the Cross. In the future, as Son of Man, He will receive dominion and glory and an everlasting kingdom; and in that bright day the whole earth will be filled with His glory (Daniel 7:13-14; Psalms 72:19). Even so, the excellent glories of the coming Kingdom will not exceed, and cannot equal, His far deeper glories as the Son of Man upon the Cross. The glory of His earthly throne is exceeded by the glory of His shameful Cross. The Kingdom will display His official glories, the Cross witnesses to His moral glories. In the day of His reign "all dominions shall serve and obey Him" and all will be put in subjection under Him as the Son of Man. In the day of His sufferings, He Himself was the obedient and subject Man. Truly every step of His path witnessed to His moral glories, for they could not be hid; but at the Cross these glories shone in their full lustre. The One who learned obedience in every step of the way was at last tested by death and found "obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross." The perfect subjection to His Father's will that marked His path, has its brightest display amidst the approaching shadows of the Cross when He can say, "Not My will but Thine be done." Every step bore testimony to His perfect love to the Father, but the supreme witness of His love is seen when in view of the Cross He can say, "That the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave Me Commandment, even so I do." His holy nature that was undefiled, and undefilable, by the sinful world He passed through, is seen in its perfection when in anticipation of the agony of being made sin, He can say, "If it be possible let this cup pass from Me."

Truly at the Cross His moral glories---His obedience, His subjection, His love, His holiness, and every other perfection, have their brightest display. There the Lord's words were made good, "Now is the Son of Man glorified."

Thus the first great statement assures us of the infinite perfection of the Son of Man — of our Saviour — the One who as the great propitiatory sacrifice has glorified God. Moreover as we seize the import of this statement. telling us of the perfection of Jesus, we see how worthy He is of our full confiding trust. In the presence of such perfection no one can say that there was any imperfection in Him, which makes it impossible to trust Him, His perfections. brought fully into display, reveal Him to be the One who is altogether lovely, possessing every beautiful trait that renders Him worthy of our trust.

Gazing upon the Son of Man at the Cross, seeing Him glorified by all His infinite perfections being brought into display, prepares us for the second great statement, "God is glorified in Him." All others had dishonoured God, but at last One is found — the Son of Man. Himself morally perfect,

who is able to undertake a work which glorifies God. But to glorify God He must be made sin, and go into the place of death. "The heavens declare the glory of God" as Creator, with infinite wisdom and power, but cannot declare the glory of His moral Being. For this the Son of Man must suffer, that by those sufferings every attribute of God may receive its highest expression. By the Cross the majesty of God is vindicated, the truth of God maintained, the righteousness of God is seen in the judgment of sin. The holiness that demanded such a sacrifice, and the love that gave it, shine in their brightest lustre. Truly the Son of Man, by His sufferings, has glorified God. This great work leads to the truth of the third great statement, "If God be glorified in Him God shall also glorify Him in Himself, and shall straightway glorify Him." If God has been glorified in Christ, God will give an everlasting proof of His satisfaction with what Christ has done. Christ glorified as a Man in the glory, is the only adequate answer to His work on the Cross, and is the eternal proof of God's satisfaction with that work. In the first statement, "Now is the Son of Man glorified," we learn the perfection of the Son of Man. In the second statement, "God is glorified in Him," we learn the perfection of His work. In the third statement, "God shall glorify Him in Himself," we learn God's perfect satisfaction with that work. We have a perfect Saviour who has done a perfect work to God's perfect satisfaction. Other Scriptures will tell us that this perfect Saviour, this perfect work, and God's perfect satisfaction are available for all, for we read, "He gave Himself a ransom for all." And God's perfect satisfaction in Christ and His work enables God to say, "Through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins."

(V. 33). The glorification of the Son of Man will involve separation from the disciples. The Lord, with His perfect sympathy, enters into the sorrow that fills the disciples' hearts at the thought of being parted from the One they had learned to love. Again and again, with touches of human tenderness He will refer to the inevitable parting, and prepare their hearts for the coming break in the earthly companionship (cf. John 14:4; John 14:28-29; John 16:4-7; John 16:16, John 16:28).

Never before had the Lord addressed the disciples as "little children." It is a term, in the original language, expressive of compassionate endearment. Thus, with tender solicitude, He broaches the subject of the coming parting. Yet a little while He would be with them. The Lord was going back to glory travelling by a road that none could follow. Afterwards believers may follow, even by a martyr's death, but not death in the way the Lord would have to meet it — as the penalty of sin. That was a path of which the Lord could say, "Whither I go, ye cannot come.

(Vv. 34, 35). Moreover the coming parting would mean that the disciples would be left without the powerful bond of the personal presence of the One they all loved. Hence the Lord gives a new commandment, "That ye love one another; as I have loved you." It has been suggested that the Lord speaks of this command as a new command, in contrast to the old command, well known to these Jewish disciples, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." The new commandment is, "That ye love one another as I have loved you." Christ loved with a love which, while never indifferent to evil, yet triumphed over all the power of evil. If we love one another after the pattern of Christ's great love, we shall not suffer evil in one another, but we shall find a way of dealing with the evil without ceasing to love one another. Nothing but the bond of love, after the divine pattern, will hold together a company of people each having a distinct personality, with different shades of character, and diverse temperaments.

Moreover a company marked by love would be so passing strange in a scene governed by lust and selfishness, that the very world would realize that such must be the disciples of Christ. The world cannot appreciate the faith and hope of the Christian circle, but divine love and its effects they can at least see and admire, if they cannot imitate. Thus a company marked by love to one another, after the pattern of Christ, would become a witness to Christ in the world from which He is absent, so that Christ. if glorified with the Father in heaven, would be glorified in the saints on earth.

(Vv. 36-38). The closing scene while occupied with Peter, carries a warning to the whole company. If the disciples are left behind to glorify Christ, let them not forget that each one has the flesh within that is ready to deny Christ. Simon Peter, apparently heedless of the new command, and thinking only of the coming parting, asks, with seeming resistance to that which he does not understand, "Lord, whither goest Thou?" The Lord answers, "Whither I go, thou canst not follow Me now, but thou shalt follow Me afterwards." The Lord was going to suffer death as the Martyr at the hands of wicked men: but, far more terrible to His holy soul, He was going into death as the holy Victim under the hand of God. This, indeed, was a path that He alone could take; Peter could not follow in that path. Afterwards, in the years to come, Peter will have the high honour to follow the Lord in the path of martyrdom.

Trusting in his love to the Lord, Peter self-confidently asserts "I will lay down my life for Thy sake," only to hear the Lord’s solemn warning, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, the cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied Me thrice."

If the flesh in a false disciple can betray the Lord, the flesh in a true one can deny the Lord. Yet let us not forget that the Lord’s love triumphed over Peter’s denial. for, as we have seen, "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." Deceived by our self-confidence we may even deny the Lord, yet we are loved by the Lord with a love that will not let us go. THE NEW COMMAND.

"A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" — John 13:34. His hour has come; at last the Father’s home, Beyond dark death, as sunlight on the hill, Shines o’er the valley of the Father’s will. The day has dawned, when He must leave His own To tread a path that He must take alone; And drawing nearer to that day of days, Upon His soul a load of sorrow weighs:

Upon His heart of love divine, well known, One rests his wearied head, with great delight;

One takes the sop, and passes into night: And thus set free, the Master’s voice is heard —

If all men are to learn that ye are Mine, Then take to heart My last — My parting word — And let your love to one another shine.’

John 14:1-31 The Introduction. The solemn scenes and serious words of John 13:1-38 from a fitting prelude to the great discourse of John 14:1-31. In John 13:1-38 we have seen the exposure of the utter corruption of the flesh, whether in the false disciple or the true. In Judas the flesh prefers a paltry sum of silver to the Son of God and, with basest treachery, will use the token of love to betray the Lord. In Peter we learn that the flesh in a believer can seek credit for itself by the profession of love and devotedness to Christ. Man in the flesh is mere clay in the hands of the

devil, and unjudged flesh in the saint is only material for the devil to use.

Disclosures of unsuspected evil in the circle of the Twelve, the shadow of the great loss they were about to experience, the premonition of the coming denial, cast their gloom over the little company. One of the number — about to betray the Lord — has gone into the night; the Lord is going whither they cannot follow; Peter is going to deny his Master. Sorrow, if not confusion of soul, presses upon their troubled hearts as the dark shadow of coming events creeps over the disciples.

Peter, hitherto so forward, is silent. Throughout these last discourses we shall hear his voice no more. For the moment all are hushed in the presence of the disclosure of the coming departure of the Lord, the coming betrayal of Judas. and the imminent denial of Peter. Then it is that we hear the voice of the Lord as He breaks the silence with these touching words, "Let not your heart be troubled." These words of infinite comfort and consolation must have come like balm to the hearts of this sorrow-stricken company. Yet though the Lord speaks to the Eleven, let us remember, as has been said, "The audience is larger than appears. In the foreground are the Eleven, behind them the universal Church. . . The hearers are men like ourselves, but they are representative men: dear to their Lord in their own persons, as His tender language shows: precious also in His sight as representing all 'who shall believe on Him through their word.'" In a pre-eminent way this great discourse breathes comfort and consolation for troubled hearts. It commences with that sweet word, "Let not your heart be troubled," and, as it draws to its close, again we hear these words, "Let not your heart be troubled. neither let it be afraid."

Yet it was hardly the troubles of the daily life of which the Lord was speaking, however much they may be lightened by these tender words. It was the special trouble of hearts about to lose the One whose infinite love had won their affections. A little later the Lord will say "Now I go My way . . . because I have said these things unto you sorrow hath filled your heart." It was the trouble of hearts that had been so attracted to Christ that they were satisfied in His presence, and sorrowful in His absence. To be left in an evil world, from which Christ is absent. is a sore trial to the heart that loves Him. To meet this special trouble the Lord will lift us above the sin of men, and the failure of saints into the company of Divine Persons. He will link us by faith with Himself in the new place to which He has gone; He will set us in relationship with the Father in heaven, and put us under the control of the Holy Spirit on earth. For the comfort of our hearts we are set in relationship with each Divine Person — the Son (1-3); the Father (4-14); and the Holy Ghost (15-26). As these discourses proceed there will be exhortations as to bearing fruit and bearing witness in a world from which we are warned to expect only hatred, persecution and tribulation. Before, however, we are called to face the opposition of a world without, we are brought into communion with Divine Persons in a scene within. The holy communion of the inner home, prepares us to face the trials of the outer world. The Disciples in Relation with Christ. John 14:1-3 The discourse (V. 1) opens with the tender and touching words "Let not your heart be troubled." Who but the Lord could have uttered such gracious words at such a solemn moment. The Lord had just foretold the thrice repeated denial of Peter, and just as the premonition of the denial is preceded by that gracious word, "Thou shalt follow Me afterwards," so it is followed by these touching words, "Let not your heart be troubled." With the treachery of Judas and the denial of Peter before them, the disciples might well be troubled. Yet, says the Lord, Let not your heart be troubled." In this early part of the discourse the Lord takes a threefold way to relieve our hearts of trouble. First, He sets Himself before us as the object of faith in the glory. "Ye believe in God — One whom we have never seen

— and now, as the Lord passes out of sight into glory, He can say, "Believe also in Me." Thus Christ, as a Man in the glory, becomes the resource and stay of the heart. Everything on earth may fail us, the world tempt us, the flesh betray us, yet Christ in the glory remains the unfailing resource of faith. As one has said. "There is no solid comfort to be found outside of Christ." Christian friends however true, relatives however loving. circumstances however favourable, health however good, prospects however pleasing — yea all on earth — will fail to give lasting comfort; but Christ in the glory remains the One to whom faith can turn and find in Him the unfailing resource of His people, throughout the long dark night of His absence.

(V. 2). Second, for the comfort of our hearts the Lord discloses to us the new home, "In My Father's house are many mansions, if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." Not only have we Christ in the glory our unfailing resource, but we have the Father's house as our abiding home. For let us note that the word 'mansions' is really 'abodes' — a home which once it is reached will never more be left — there we shall abide. On earth we have "no continuing city." We are pilgrims and strangers here. Our abiding home is in the Father's house. Moreover in the Father's house there are "many" abodes. On earth there was no room for Christ, and little room for those who are Christ's, but in the Father's house there is room for all that are Christ's — the great and the small. If it were not so He would have told His disciples. He would not have gathered His disciples around Himself, and led them outside this world, were He not leading them into a scene of blessedness well known to Him as the Father's house. To this home the Lord was going. On the cross He prepared His people for the place; His presence in the glory prepares the place for His people. Thus we are lifted above the weakness and failure of all things earthly, carried beyond the changing scenes of time, to enter in spirit a better world. there to find a home prepared in the Father's house.

(V. 3.) Third, for the comfort of our hearts, the Lord sets before us His coming again to receive us into the home. In due time other Scriptures will disclose to us the order of events in connection with His coming, but here, for our comfort, we learn the supreme joy of His coming. His coming will indeed close our wilderness journey. It will heal all the breaches among the people of God; it will gather together the divided and scattered saints. It will end the sorrows, the trials, and the labours of His people. It will take us out of a scene of darkness and death and usher us into a home of light and life and love. All this it will do and more, but, above all else, it will bring us into the company of Jesus. As He can say, "I will receive you unto Myself that where I am there ye may be also." What would heaven be without Jesus? To be in a scene where there will be "no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying" — where all is holiness and perfection — will be blessed indeed, but if Jesus were not there the heart would still remain unsatisfied. The supreme happiness of His coming is that we shall be with Him. He has been with us in this dark world of death, and we shall be with Him in life's eternal home — the Father's house.

This, the highest aspect of His coming, discloses to us the secret longings of His heart. We learn, in these words of the Lord, the deep desire of His heart to have His people with Himself for the joy and satisfaction of His own heart. He wants our company. He is the object of our faith in heaven, we are the objects of His love on earth. If our treasure is in heaven, His treasure is on earth. Christ Himself has gone, but the heart of Christ is down here and. as one has truly said, "If His heart is here, He Himself is not far off.

What comfort for troubled hearts fills these opening verses! Christ in the glory our unfailing resource, a home in the glory that awaits us; and a Man in the glory that wants us.

How blessed too is the manner of the Lord’s instruction, and how different to the way of mere men. In a little He will enlighten us as to the journey through this world and warn us as to trials and persecution, but first and foremost He discloses to us the glorious end of the journey. Such lofty themes we should have reserved for the close of the discourse. He takes a better and more perfect way. He will not let us face the journey through a hostile world until He has assured our hearts of the abiding home with Him in the Father’s house. He would have us face the journey in the light of the home to which it leads. It has been remarked, "The passage through the valley is changed, when once we have caught sight of the hills beyond." For our comfort, too, these transcendent revelations of the unseen world are set before us in simple and homely words. Truths so great that they may well stagger the highest intellect are conveyed in words so simple that they are within the grasp of a little child that believes in Jesus. The Disciples in Relation with the Father. John 14:4-14 The Lord has set before us the end of the journey, now He will lead us into our privileges while on the way. In the verses that follow we are set in relationship with the Father. We have not yet reached the Father’s house but it is our privilege to know the Father — the One to whom the house belongs — before we enter there. And if we are brought to a present knowledge of the Father it is in order that we may have access to the Father while passing through the world. The great purpose of this part of the discourse is that we may "know," "see," and "come" to the Father, and, coming to the Father, we might, in all the happy confidence of children, make known our requests in the name of Christ.

(Vv. 5, 6). The Lord introduces this great theme with the word, "Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know." Thomas, with a very different thought in his mind, fails to catch the meaning of the Lord’s words. In reply to the question of Thomas "How can we know the way?" the Lord plainly shows that He is speaking of the Person to whom He is going and not simply of a place as Thomas wrongly supposed. To this Person — the Father — Christ is the way; the One, too, in whom the truth of the Father is set forth. Moreover He is the life in which the truth of the Father can be enjoyed. There is moreover no other way to the Father, hence the Lord adds, "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me." Words of deeply solemn significance in a day when men reject the claims of the Son while talking of the Fatherhood of God. The words of the Lord anticipate the inspired words of the Apostle who, at a later time, will write, "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father" (1 John 2:23).

(V. 7). It is however equally true that to know the Son is to know the Father. Thus the Lord can say to His disciples, "If ye had known Me ye would have known My Father also: and from henceforth ye know Him and have seen Him."

(Vv. 8-11). Philip, like Thomas, cannot rise above that which is material. Thomas had thought of a material place: Philip thinks of physical sight, and therefore says, "Lord, show us the Father and it sufficeth us." The Lord in His reply clearly shows that He is speaking of the vision of faith. He asks a searching question, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip?" Then the Lord states, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." To look beyond the outward form and see the Son by faith, is indeed to see the Father; for the Son is the perfect revelation of the Father. The unbelieving world did not see the Son; all they saw was the reputed

son of Joseph — the Carpenter. Only faith could see, in that lowly Man, the Only Begotten Son who came to declare the Father. The One who dwelt in the bosom of the Father could alone declare the heart of the Father. Abraham could tell us that God is Almighty: Moses could tell us that God is the I AM eternal and unchanging. But neither Abraham nor Moses were great enough to declare to us the heart of the Father. None but a divine Person is great enough to reveal a divine Person. Thus it is that the Lord immediately declares the perfect equality and identity of the Father and the Son, for He can say, "I am in the Father and the Father in Me." The passage of the Son through this world is not simply a history of the Father and the Son, but rather of the Father in the Son.

Once we have seen by faith the glory of the Son, it becomes simple to see the Father revealed in the Son. Because of who He is, as equal and identified with. the Father, the Lord can at once bring forward His "words" and His "works" as the revelation of the Father. The grace, the love, the wisdom, and the power that shone in His words and works declare to us the heart of the Father.

(Vv. 12-14). Yet further, if on earth the Son had glorified the Father, in making known His heart through His words, still more would the Father be glorified by the Son when. taking His place on high, He would, through the "greater works" of the disciples, still declare the Father’s heart; and further would glorify the Father in answering requests made to the Father in the name of Christ. At this point in the discourse the Lord ceases to speak of the experiences of His words and works which the disciples had enjoyed while He was yet with them, and passes on to speak of the new and deeper experiences of His power after His departure to the Father. The change in the discourse is marked by the words, "Verily verily" — words generally used to introduce some fresh truth. Thus the Lord reveals to His amazed disciples the new truth that after His departure the believer in Jesus would do the works that Jesus had done in person, and, more surprising still, would do greater works. The Lord connects this greater display of power with His going to the Father. In returning to the Father He was going to the source of all power and blessing. Thus by His presence with the Father the full resources of heaven would be opened to the one on earth who believes in Christ and prays in His name.

These transitional verses carry us into the history of the early Church, when, instead of only a few disciples being gathered under the ministry of Jesus, thousands were gathered through the preaching of the Apostles, and "many signs and wonders were "wrought among the people," and the very "shadow of Peter passing by" carried healing to the sick; when the dead were raised and "God wrought special miracles by the hand of Paul," so that handkerchiefs from his body healed those upon whom they were placed. This mighty power was available for faith expressing itself through prayer in His name. It has been truly said, "Requests made in the name of another are understood to imply the appropriation to one’s self of his claims, his merits, his rights to be heard." The Lord, by His own words, gives this privilege to those who are in relationship with Himself by faith. It was something new to the disciples to ask in the name of Christ, and, as all else in these discourses, is the outcome of the Lord’s departure, for asking in His name supposes the absence of Christ. The phrase to "ask in My name" occurs five times in these discourses.

Thus in the words and works of Jesus on earth we learn the Father’s heart, and we still learn the Father through the "greater works" done by the disciples under the direction of the Lord from His place on high: and we learn the Father’s love as we find the Lord acting for us in response to our

requests to the Father in the name of Christ. In a world gone far from God. where all sought their own, He was ever one with the Father in mind and purpose and affection, and found His delight in the Father’s will. Though a world of sin made Him the Man of sorrows yet He found unbroken rest, and constant joy in the Father’s love. Into this same blessed relationship with the Father He would bring us that we too may find our delight, our rest, our joy in the Father’s love.

All has been revealed in the Son. The love of the Father’s heart, the purpose of the Father’s mind, the grace of the Father’s hand, all has been set forth in Christ the Son. All too has been revealed as our present portion. We shall have no different revelation of the Father when we get to heaven than we have now. All has been revealed on earth. The only difference being, now we see through a glass darkly, then face to face. But what we shall fully enjoy in heaven has been fully revealed on earth. We wait to have the glory of the Father’s house disclosed to our wondering eyes, but the love of the Father’s heart has been revealed, for the joy of our hearts, on earth, though, alas. our feeble faith may have but little responded to the revelation. The Disciples in Relation with the Holy Spirit. John 14:15-31

Having carried the thoughts of the disciples beyond the present into the near future the Lord proceeds to disclose the second great event that would mark the coming days. Not only was the Lord going to the Father, but the Holy Spirit was coming from the Father.

Thus the Lord prepares the disciples for the momentous changes about to take place. The Son will return to the Father to take His place as a Man in the glory; the Holy Spirit will come to take up His abode in believers as a divine Person on earth. These two stupendous events would introduce Christianity and bring the Church into being, sustain the Church on her journey through this world, preserve her from the evil of the world, maintain her in testimony for Christ, and at last present the Church to Christ in glory.

Here, however, the Lord does not disclose the great doctrine of the Church and its formation, nor indeed of the testimony the Church would bear through the Spirit. The time for such unfoldings had hardly come. It is rather the deep spiritual experiences, that believers will enjoy through the coming of the Spirit. that is before the Lord. This was fitting for such a moment. The thought of losing One so dear to them — whose presence they had enjoyed — filled their hearts with sorrow. Hence it is the Lord speaks of the coming of another Comforter, One who would not only remove the sense of loneliness, but lead their hearts into a deeper and more intimate acquaintance with their Master than they had known in the days when He dwelt amongst them on earth. It is these secret experiences enjoyed by the Spirit, that will prepare the disciples to be witnesses for Christ in the power of the Spirit. May we not say that our testimony to Christ is often so feeble because we so little enjoy this personal intimacy with Christ into which the Spirit alone can lead? We attempt to take up service without living in the secret place of communion with the Father and the Son by the Spirit. It is the unfolding of these secret experiences that gives such preciousness to this portion of the last discourse. It is an inside scene in which the believer is brought into the company of divine Persons in order that in due time he may bear testimony to Christ in the outside world from which Christ has gone.

(V. 15). It is not a little striking the way the Lord introduces the great theme of the coming of the Holy Spirit. He says, "If ye love Me keep My commandments." In the course of the Gospel of John we have heard again and again of the Lord’s love to the disciples, now for the first time we hear of

the disciples' love to the Lord. The gift of the Spirit is thus connected with a company of people who love and obey the Lord. For such a company the Lord delights to pray to the Father to give the Comforter. Moreover do not these words indicate that the experiences enjoyed in the power of the Spirit can only be known by one who is living a life of love and obedience to the Lord? In the preceding verses the Lord has spoken of faith and prayer (12-14); now He speaks of love and obedience. Thus we gather the Lord intimates that the deep spiritual experiences into which the Comforter leads are opened to those who are marked by faith which believes in the Lord, dependence which prays in His name, love which cleaves to the Lord, and obedience which delights to keep His commandments. These are the great moral characteristics which prepare the soul to profit by the presence of the Spirit. It is not enough to have the Spirit abiding with us there must be in heart and life a state suited to the Spirit.

(V. 16). In the commencement of the Gospel the Baptist has told us that the Lord would baptise with the Holy Spirit. Later, in connection with the Lord's visit to Jerusalem, we are plainly told that, under the figure of the living water, He spake of the Spirit which they that believe on Him should receive — and moreover that this great gift was not then given because Christ was not yet glorified. Now the time has come when the Lord is about to be glorified, and this becomes the fitting moment for the Lord Himself to disclose to His disciples the great truth of the coming to earth of this divine Person.

Very blessedly, and with perfect suitability to the moment, to Lord speaks of the Holy Spirit as a Comforter. However great and varied the functions of the Spirit, to comfort is one that the disciples specially needed at the moment. There is however a deeper significance in the title "Comforter" that may be easily overlooked. for in our modern usage of the word it mainly implies one who sympathises with us in our sorrows; in its primary use it means one that "stands by to strengthen, support, and encourage."* Thus in the Comforter the disciples would have One who would stand by them to strengthen them in their weakness, and comfort them in their sorrow.

Moreover the Lord speaks of the Comforter as another Comforter. thus comparing the One who was coming with Himself, for had He not been with them supporting, encouraging and comforting them? Further the Lord not only compares, but contrasts the Comforter with Himself. The Lord had only dwelt with them a few brief years, whereas the Comforter who was coming would abide with them for ever. Many an Old Testament Scripture had spoken of the Holy Spirit coming upon certain men and for a time controlling them for some special purpose, but that a divine Person should come to abide for ever was something entirely new.

{*The word is derived from the Latin con — together, and fortis — to make strong. Attention has been called to a striking use of the word in the sense of strengthening in Wiclif's rendering of Isaiah 41:7, "He comforteth with nailes, that it should not be moved." Also this use is found in an early translation of Php 4:3. "I may alle things in Him that comforteth me."}

(V. 17). A further contrast between Christ and this coming Person is that while Christ is the Truth, the Holy Spirit is spoken of as the Spirit of truth. In Christ we see the truth set forth objectively. By the Spirit of truth we have wrought in us a true apprehension of all that is set forth in Christ In further contrast with the Lord, the Spirit is One whom the world cannot receive or know because "it seeth Him not.'' Christ had become incarnate and could be seen of man, and was thus presented to be received of man. The Holy Spirit would not become incarnate, and is not presented as an

object that can be seen visibly or known intellectually. To the world He is not a divine Person but, at best, only a poetic and vague influence. To the disciples He will be no mere influence, but a Person who abides with them, in contrast to Christ who was leaving them; and would be in them, in contrast to Christ who was with them but not in them

(Vv. 18-20). In these verses the Lord passes from speaking of the Person of the Holy Spirit, to unfolding the normal effects of His presence in the believer. The departure of the Lord to be with the Father, and the coming of the Spirit would not mean that they had lost one divine Person and gained another. One has truly said, "The promise is not of a substitution which excludes, but of a means which secures His presence." Thus the Lord can say to His disciples, I will not leave you orphans: I will come to you." It has been said, "When Christ was here on earth, the Father was not far off, 'I am not alone because the Father is with Me,' and if the Comforter is here, Christ is not far distant."

If the 18th verse tells us that the coming of the Spirit will bring Christ very near to us, the following two verses unfold the response in the believer to the Christ who comes. The Lord expresses these apprehensions of the believer in the three definite statements "Ye see Me," "Ye shall live," and "Ye shall know." The Holy Spirit does not come to speak of Himself, or occupy us with Himself, nor form a cult of the Spirit, but to lead the soul to Christ. In a little while the world would see Christ no more, but when He had passed out of the sight of men, He would, in the power of the Spirit still be the object of faith for the believer. To the world Christ would become only an historical figure of one who had lived a beautiful life and died a martyr's death; to the believer He would be still a living Person, the conscious sense of whose presence they would be able to realize and enjoy by the power of the Spirit. Moreover in seeing Him believers would live. The men of the world live because the world exists with its pleasures, and politics, and social round. When these things fail the life of the worldling ceases to have any interest. The Christian lives because Christ lives, and even as Christ, the object of our life, for ever lives, so the believer's life is an eternal life.

Moreover by the Spirit the believer knows that Christ is in the Father, that believers are in Christ and that Christ is in believers. We know that Christ has a supreme place in the Father's affections; that we have a place in the heart of Christ, and that Christ has a place in our hearts. The world can neither "see." nor "live" nor "know." It is blind to the glories of Christ; it is dead in trespasses and sins; it is ignorant of God; but, in the power of the Spirit, there will be a company of people upon earth who "see," and "live," and "know." They have Christ in the glory as the object of their souls; a life that finds its joy and delight in Christ, and the knowledge of the place they have in His heart.

(V. 21-24). Verses 18 to 20 have presented to us the normal effect of the coming of the Spirit. The verses that follow present the spiritual qualifications that would enable the individual believer to enter into, and enjoy, the privileges that are open to us in the power of the Spirit. Though alas there has been a grave departure from these normal conditions, by professing Christendom, it is blessed to see that what should be true of the whole can still be enjoyed by the individual. Thus it is important to notice that at this point the Lord's teaching becomes intensely individual. Hitherto the Lord has used the words "you" and "ye" (18-20); now He changes to the use of such words as "he" and "a man" (21-24);

Love and obedience are the great qualifications for entrance into these deeper experiences. Already the Lord has said, "If ye love Me, keep My commandments," now He says, "He that hath

My commandments and keepeth them, he is it that loveth Me." It has been truly said that the former presented love as the spring of obedience. the latter obedience as the proof of love. Every expression of the Father's mind was a commandment to Christ, and in the same way every expression of the mind of Christ is a command to the one that loves Him. The one that loves Christ shall be loved of the Father and of Christ. Such an one would be made conscious in a special way of the love of divine Persons. To such the Lord would manifest Himself. At this point Judas (not Iscariot) breaks in with his question, "Lord how is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us and not unto the world?" Judas, with Jewish thoughts, and Jewish hopes in his mind, is utterly puzzled by these communications. Not realising the change that was coming, and still clinging to the idea of a visible kingdom about to be established, he cannot understand how this can be if the Lord does not manifest Himself to the world. His brethren, according to the flesh, had a similar thought when they said "Show Thyself to the world" (John 17:4). And still, through the same ignorance of the calling of the church and the character of the day in which we live, there are many true Christians who, in a variety of ways, still say to the Lord, "Show Thyself to the world." Such would fain make Christ a leader of philanthropic works, and the centre of great movements for the betterment of the world. They seek to bring Christ back to the world, not seeing that the Spirit of God has come to lead believers out of the world to Christ in heaven At first sight the Lord's answer seems hardly to meet the question put by Judas. The time had not come for the full unfolding of the heavenly character of Christianity. Nevertheless the Lord's answer corrects the wrong thought in the mind of the disciples. Judas was thinking of a visible display before the world, the Lord is speaking of a manifestation to an individual-Judas speaks of the world; the Lord speaks of "a man." The world had rejected the Lord, and the Lord had done with the world as such. Now it would be a question of individuals being drawn out of the world by the attractive power of One to whom their hearts are linked in love and affection. In His answer the Lord enlarges upon this truth. Not only will the one that loves the Lord keep His commandments, as already stated, but such an one will keep the Lord's "words." This is more than His commandments. His commandments express His mind as to the details of our path. His "word," as the following verse tells us, is not simply His own word but the Father's which sent Him, and speaks of all that He came to make known of the Father's heart, and the Father's counsels for heaven and the world to come. His "commandments" throw needed light on our path, His "words" light up the glorious future by revealing the counsels of the Father's heart. To cherish His words, therefore, makes room for the Father; so now the Lord can say, "We will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

(V. 25, 26). The two opening words of these verses introduce a fresh stage in this part of the Lord's discourse. He has set before us the normal experiences that believers would enjoy by the Spirit (18-20) then the experience open to each individual believer (21-24); now the Lord speaks of the coming of the Holy Spirit more especially in connection with the Eleven. For the first time the Comforter is definitely said to be "the Holy Spirit." He is spoken of as a Divine Person who will be sent by the Father in the name of Christ. Coming in the name of Christ tells us that He comes to represent the interests of Christ during the absence of Christ. He is not here to exalt believers, to make them great in this scene, nor advance their worldly interests. His sole business in a world that has rejected Christ, is to attract to Christ, to gather out a people for Christ, to exalt Christ. In the course of these last communications we shall find that the Spirit takes a threefold way to maintain the interests of Christ. First, in John 14:1-31 by drawing out our affections for Christ: second in John 15:1-27 by opening our lips in testimony to Christ: third, in John 16:1-33, by

supporting us in the presence of the opposition of the world by unfolding to us the Father’s counsels for the world to come.

Here the great work of the Spirit is to engage us with Christ Himself. There are two ways in which He awakens our affections for Christ. First the Lord tells the Eleven, "He shall teach you all things." The "all things" of verse 26 are in contrast to "these things" of verse 25. The Lord had spoken of certain things, but there were things belonging to the glory of Christ, which were beyond the apprehension of the Eleven at that moment. The Lord was limited in His communications by the limited spiritual capacity of the disciples. With the coming of the Spirit there would be an enlarged spiritual comprehension which would make it possible for the Spirit to communicate "all things" connected with Christ in the glory. Secondly, the Lord can say, "the Spirit will bring all things to your remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you." He will not only reveal the new things concerning Christ in His new place — things that carry us far into eternal glory — but He will recall the gracious communications made by Christ in His sojourn on earth. All that is of Christ, past present and future, is infinitely precious. Nothing that is of Christ shall be lost. How important that those who by their words and writings were going to instruct others, should have the Lord’s words recalled to them by a Divine Person. In reporting these words to us they are not left to their own imperfect, and failing, memories. Their report of His words will have all the absolute perfection of One who recalls them without any admixture of human frailty.

(V. 27-31). With the preceding verses the Lord has closed this gracious ministry that sets His people in relation with Divine Persons. This ministry of comfort and consolation — this communion with Divine Persons — prepares the disciples for the departure of the One they love. Thus it is that in these closing verses the Lord can speak more freely of the coming parting.

If, however, He was going away He would leave His peace with His disciples. In outward circumstances He was the Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. On every hand He had to meet the contradiction of sinners, but walking in communion with the Father, and in subjection to the Father’s will, He ever enjoyed peace of heart. This same peace would be the portion of the believer, if enjoying this communion with Divine Persons, and so under the control of the Spirit that the believer’s will is refused. Surrounded by a world of unrest the believer’s heart would be garrisoned by the peace of Christ. It would be a peace shared with Christ, for in giving His disciples peace, He gives not as the world which parts with what it gives.

Moreover if the Lord was going away, it would be but for a time, for He was coming again. In the meantime, unselfish love would rejoice in that His path of suffering was over, and that He was going to the Father. He plainly forewarns them of His departure so that when it took place their faith might not be shaken.

Hereafter He would not talk much with them; for the ruler of this world was coming. This would mean that the last great conflict would be entered, which would annul the power of Satan. The triumph over Satan was assured, for in Christ the devil had nothing. His death would not be the result of Satan’s power, but the outcome of Christ’s love to the Father. His perfect obedience to the Father’s commandment, even obeying unto death, is the everlasting proof of His love to the Father. With these words, that breathe of His love and obedience to the Father, the Lord brings this portion of His discourses to an end by saying, "Arise let us go hence." In love to the Father the Lord goes hence to do the Father’s bidding, but He associates His disciples with Himself. There

will come a time when, as the Lord has already said, "Whither I go ye cannot follow Me now," but there are a few more steps they can take with Him, even though on their part they be halting steps. Thus together they pass from the upper room into the outer world. THE NEW PROMISE.

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

Long years have passed — the ages roll away — The shadows lengthen; darker grows the night; And still we wait to pass into the light, When we shall hear our Lord, and Master, say, "Arise my love my fair one, come away."

Yet loving us, He longs that we should know, Some foretaste of His presence here below, While waiting for the coming of the day: So thus He speaks, seeking our hearts to win, 'If any man will bid Me enter in —

If loving Me, he would with Me have part —

Let him My words obey, so shall it be, My presence shall bring sunlight to his heart, And I will sup with him, and he with Me.'

John 15:1-27 The Introduction. The great end of the discourse in John 13:1-38 is to set believers in right relations with Christ and with one another. in order that they may enjoy communion with, or "part with," Christ, in the new place He has taken, as Man, in the Father's house. In the discourse that follows, (John 14:1-31), we are permitted to contemplate believers in the enjoyment of this communion with Divine Persons — with Christ in the Father's house; with the Father revealed in the Son; and with the Holy Spirit sent from the Father.

These two discourses are divided from those that follow by the words of the Lord, "Arise let us go hence" (John 14:31). With these words the Lord passes, with His disciples, from the upper room into the outer world. The discourses which follow wear a character in keeping with the place of their utterance; for now the disciples are viewed as in the world from which Christ has been rejected, bearing fruit to the Father and bearing witness to Christ. It has been truly said, "In the former, the keynote is consolation in view of departure; in the latter, it is instruction for the state which will ensue. There as well as here, the Speaker instructs; here, as well as there, He consoles." The divisions of this fresh discourse are plain:- First, in verses 1 to 8. the theme is fruitbearing for the Father.

Second, in verses 9 to 17, we have a presentation of the Christian company — the circle of love — wherein alone fruit can be found for the Father.

Third, in verses 18 to 25, there passes before us the Christless world — the circle of hate — by which the Christian company is surrounded.

Fourth, in verses 26, 27, the Comforter — the Holy Spirit — is brought before us, testifying to the Lord in glory and enabling the disciples to bear witness to Christ on earth.

Fruit-bearing. John 15:1-8 The Lord introduces the subject of fruitbearing with the words, "I am the true vine, and My Father is the husbandman." Such words would have a strange sound in the ears of the Eleven, accustomed, as they were. by the Psalms and the Prophets, to think of Israel as the

vine. The 80th Psalm had spoken of Israel as a vine brought out of Egypt. Isaiah, in the song of the Beloved touching His vineyard, sets forth, under the figure of the vine, the love and care which Jehovah has bestowed upon Israel. Jeremiah speaks of Israel as "a noble vine." Alas! Israel had brought forth no fruit for God. Isaiah mourns that they brought forth only "wild grapes:" and Jeremiah complains that the "noble vine" became "the degenerate plant of a strange vine." In like manner Hosea speaks of Israel as an "empty vine" only bringing "forth fruit unto himself," but nothing for God (Isaiah 5:1-7; Jeremiah 2:21; Hosea 10:1).

Through years of longsuffering patience, God had, in various ways, tested Israel seeking for fruit, but found only wild grapes. The last and greatest test was the presence of the beloved Son. The deliberate rejection of the Son was the final proof that Israel was indeed a "degenerate plant" and an "empty vine."

Thus the moment has come to disclose to the disciples that Israel is set aside, and, if they are to bear fruit for God, it will be no longer as connected with Israel — the degenerate vine, but with Christ. the true Vine. Christ and His disciples will take the place of Jerusalem and her children.

However, while the discourse of the Lord introduces us to that which takes the place of Israel on the earth, it hardly presents Christianity in its heavenly relations. It does not contemplate relationship with Christ in heaven as members of His body by the Holy Spirit — a vital relationship which cannot be broken; but relationship with Christ on earth by the profession of discipleship. This profession may be real or it may be mere profession, hence the Lord speaks of two kinds of branches, those that have life and prove their vitality by bringing forth fruit, and those that have no life and are cast forth and burned.

How fitting then that the vine, of all plants should be used as a figure, seeing that "fruit' is the great theme of the discourse as being the evidence of true discipleship. Other trees may be useful apart from their fruit; with the vine it is not so. Ezekiel, speaking of the vine, asks, "Shall wood be taken thereof to do any work? "or will men take a pin of it to hang any vessel thereon?" (Ezekiel 15:3). If the vine produces no fruit it is useless.

What then is the spiritual significance of fruit? May we not say that fruit is the expression of Christ in the believer? We read in Galatians 5:22-23, that "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness fidelity, meekness, self-control." What is this however, but a beautiful description of Christ as He passed through this world in humiliation? Hence if such fruit is seen in believers, it will result in the reproduction of Christ in His people. Christ personally has gone from this scene. but it is God's intention that Christ characteristically should still be seen in those that are Christ's. Christ in Person has gone to the Father's house Christ in character is continued in His people on earth.

Fruit is not exactly the exercise of gift, nor service, nor work. We are indeed exhorted "to walk worthily of the Lord unto all well-pleasing bearing fruit in every good work" (Colossians 1:10. N. Tr.). This passage, while showing how closely fruit-bearing is linked with good works, yet clearly distinguishes between them. The good works are to be done in such a Christlike manner that,, in the works that benefit man, there will be found fruit acceptable to God. The natural man can do very many good works, but in such works there will be found no fruit for God. Does not the Apostle, in 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 warn us that we may be active in service and good works, and

yet lack "love," the most excellent expression of fruit?

If service and work were fruit it would largely be limited to those who possess gift and ability; but if fruit is the character of Christ then indeed it becomes a possibility, as well as a privilege, for every believer, from the oldest to the youngest, to bear fruit. Who that loves Christ, and admires the perfections of the One who is altogether lovely, would not desire to exhibit, in some measure, His graces, and thus bring forth fruit? If this is the desire of the heart there are three ways indicated by the Lord, to help us in the fulfilment of our desire. In order to help us to bring forth fruit there is first the gracious dealings of the Father; then the practical cleansing by the power of Christ's word; and lastly the responsibility of the believer to abide in Christ. The Father's dealings are represented by the methods of the husbandman. First there is the sad possibility that some branches, though having a living link with the vine, may bring forth no fruit. Such the Father taketh away. Very different are such branches to the withered branches of verse 6, which are cast forth and burned. Here it is the Father that taketh away, there it is men that cast them forth. Was it not thus with some of the Corinthian saints whose walk was such that the Father would not leave them here to bring reproach upon the name of Christ, so took them home, as we read, "many sleep" (1 Corinthians 11:30). Then there is the gracious action of the Father with those who bear fruit, in order that they may bring forth more fruit. Such He purges. The chastening and discipline of the Father is to remove all that hinders the expression of the character of Christ. It may indeed be painful, for, "no chastening at the time seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Hebrews 12:11). If exercised before the Father as to His dealings with us, we shall not be soured and embittered by adversity, but rather softened and mellowed so that in result the character of Christ is seen in us and we become fruitful.

(V. 3.) Secondly there is the Lord's own gracious dealing with us in order that we may bear fruit. He can say, "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." This is the practical separation from everything contrary to Christ produced by His word. At that moment the disciples were clean, for had not their feet been in the hands of the Lord? The water applied by His hands had effectually done its cleansing work. Would we know something of the practical cleansing of the word then indeed we shall do well to sit at His feet like Mary of old, and hear His word. We all know what it is to go to Him with our confessions, our difficulties, and our exercises, and well it is that He should hear our halting words but it may be that we seldom get alone with Him, for the sake of being in His company and hearing His word. And yet what can be more cleansing, and more productive of fruit, than sitting at His feet and hearing His word? Mary who chose this good part brought forth fruit so precious to Christ that He can say, "Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her" (Matthew 26:13).

(Vv. 4, 5). The third means by which the life of the disciple may be rendered fruitful is found in his own hands. It is summed up by the twice repeated word, "Abide in Me." Abiding in Christ presents our privilege, as well as our responsibility, to constantly walk in dependence upon Christ. As one has said, abiding in Christ is "practical habitual nearness of heart to Him." If we have learnt that fruit is the reproduction of the character of Christ, expressed by "love joy, self-control," we shall realise that such an ideal cannot be reached in our own strength. The realisation of the moral excellence of the fruit on the one hand, and our own exceeding weakness on the other will

convince us of the truth of the Lord’s words, "Without Me ye can do nothing." His fruit may indeed be sweet to our taste, but it is only as we abide under His shadow that we shall partake of His fruit. Without the light and warmth of the sun, the natural vine could not bear fruit, and unless we abide in the light and love of the presence of Christ we too shall be fruitless. If we abide in Christ then indeed Christ will be in us, and if Christ is in us we shall exhibit the lovely character of Christ.

Thus it becomes clear that fruit is not produced by making fruit an object, or by thinking of fruit; it is the outcome of having Christ as an object of thinking of Him. Christ precedes fruit.

(V. 6). In verse six we have the solemn case of the dead branch — the mere professor, who takes the name of Christ, but has no vital link with Christ. Such can bring forth no fruit. In the figure used the dead branch does not come under the personal dealing of the Husbandman, but is dealt with by others. So the fruitless, and therefore lifeless, professor is not dealt with by the Father but, under the government of God, is dealt with by the executors of His judgment. And here the branch is not "taken away" but "cast forth," "withered," "cast into the fire," and "burned." Was not Judas a solemn and fearful example of a withered branch. In the case of those to whom the Lord was speaking the link with Himself was vital, for had He not just said "Ye are clean"? For this reason the Lord does not say, "If ye do not abide" but "If a man abideth not in Me." The terms are changed in order to exclude the thought of a true disciple being cast forth and burned.

(V. 7, 8). Having unfolded to us the gracious ways by which the life of the believer is made fruitful, the Lord proceeds to set forth the results that flow from bearing fruit. First, on the part of the disciples, the effect of a heart actively and constantly walking in dependence upon Christ, and thus Christ’s own words constantly forming the thoughts and affections, would be to enable such an one to ask and pray according to the mind of the Lord, and so praying, obtain an answer to the requests. A second great result has reference to the Father. Fruit bearing brings glory to the Father. Christ was ever the perfect expression of the Father, thus in the measure in which we exhibit the character of Christ, we too shall set forth the truth as to the Father, and thus glorify the Father.

Finally as we bear fruit so shall we become witnesses to Christ Himself. Exhibiting His character it will become manifest to all the world that we are His disciples. The Christian Company. John 15:9-17 In the last discourses of the Lord there is a progressive unfolding of the truth, which prepares the disciples for the setting aside of the earthly Jewish system, with which they had been connected, and the introduction of the new Christian company, heavenly in origin and destiny, though left for a while in the world to represent Christ — the Man in the glory. As we listen to the Lord’s utterances, we do well to keep in mind the two great facts that underlie the whole teaching of the farewell words. First, the great fact, repeatedly brought before us, that the Lord was about to leave the world in view of taking a new place as Man in heaven; second, the fact that a divine Person — the Holy Spirit — was coming from heaven to earth. Consequent upon these two great facts there would be found in this world a company of believers united to Christ in the glory. and to one another by the Holy Spirit. It is to this new company, represented by the disciples, that the Lord addresses Himself in these last words.

Having revealed to His disciples the desire of His heart that they should bear fruit — the expression of His own lovely character — in a world from which He will be absent, He now presents before them the new Christian company in which alone fruit can be found. Is it not plain

that the full expression of fruit demands a company; for many of the graces of Christ could hardly be expressed by a disciple in isolation? Longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, and other traits of Christ, can only have their practical expression as we are found in company with others. In the opening verse of John 13:1-38 we are told that during the absence of Christ there are those on earth that He calls "His own," and that He loves them to the end. The fact that He loves them to the end proves that in spite of all failure, they will exist to the end. Outwardly "His own" may be broken and scattered but under His eye they still remain. "The Lord knoweth them that are His." Happy for those believers who delight in the company of "His own." If Christ personally were present on earth we should all like to be in His company; but if He is gone we shall surely like to be with those who express something of His character. If, in the midst of all the confusion of Christendom, we can still find a few who, without any pretension, morally set forth something of Christ they will surely be very attractive to the heart that loves Christ; while the great religious systems of men, in which there is so much of man and so little of Christ, will cease to attract.

How important then that we should give earnest heed to a passage that unfolds to us the great moral features of the new Christian company that forms Christ's Assembly during His absence. In speaking of the Christian company we must beware of narrowing it down to a limited number of saints on the one hand, or enlarging it to include those that are not Christ's on the other.

(V. 9, 10). The first and greatest mark of the Christian company is the love of Christ. The Christian company is loved by Christ. They may be almost unknown by the world, or if known despised and hated, but they are loved by Christ; and such the depth of His love, that it can only be measured by the Father's love to Christ. The Father had looked down upon Christ as a Man on earth, and loved Him with all the perfection of divine love; and now Christ, from the glory, looks upon His own in this world, and, through the opened heavens, there streams down upon them the love of Christ. To such the Lord says, "Abide in My love." Their enjoyment of their blessings, as well as their power in testimony, will depend upon their abiding in the conscious sense of the love of Christ. Those other solemn words of the Lord, "Thou hast left thy first love," addressed to the angel of the Church of Ephesus at a later day, indicate the first step on the road that leads to the ruin and scattering of the Christian company on earth. Their next downward step was they ceased to give a united testimony to Christ — the candlestick was removed (Revelation 2:4-5). When Christians walked in the enjoyment of divine love, nothing could stand against their united testimony When they lost their first love to Christ, through losing the sense of Christ's love to them. they soon ceased to present a united testimony before the world. How often has the history of the Church as a whole been repeated in local companies of the saints. If, however, any would answer to the Lord's words and continue in His love, let them take heed to the Lord's directions for He points the way. We can only continue in His love as we walk in the path of obedience, "If ye keep my commandments ye shall abide in my love." The child that pursues his own will, in disobedience to the parent, has very little appreciation, or enjoyment, of the parent's love. So with the Christian, it is only as we walk in obedience to the Lord's revealed mind that we shall retain the enjoyment of the Lord's love.

It has been well said that we keep ourselves in the love of Christ 'as one would abide in the sunshine by keeping in the place where the sunshine falls. The love of Christ rests on the way of obedience. and shines along the path of His commandments. The keeping His commandments does not create the love, any more than walking in sunny places creates the sunshine; and

accordingly the exhortation is not to seek, or merit, or obtain the love, but to remain in it." The Lord, Himself, was the perfect example of One who trod the path of obedience, for He could say, "I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love."

(V. 11). The second great mark of the Christian company is "joy;" but it is Christ's joy. The Lord can say, "These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." This is not mere natural joy, still less the joy of the world. It is Christ's joy, a joy that flowed from the "uninterrupted sense and enjoyment of the Father's love." There are, indeed, earthly joys which are sanctioned by God and, in their place and time, can be rightly used; but such joys will fail us, "Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away." The wine of earthly joy runs out. We may indeed "drink of the brook in the way," but the brook in the way dries up. (Psalms 110:7; 1 Kings 17:7) There is however a fountain of joy within the believer that springs up into life eternal and will never fail. Thus it is the Lord can speak of His joy as that which can "remain" in us. This indeed is a joy that will outlast the passing joys of time, — the joy that remains. The joy that has its source in the Father's love will be as lasting as the love from which it springs.

Moreover the joy of which the Lord speaks is not only a joy that remains, but He can say to His disciples it will be "in you." Being in us it is not like the joy of this world, dependent upon outward circumstances. The Psalmist could say "Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and wine increased" (Psalms 4:7). Earthly joys depend on the prosperity of outward circumstances, the gladness of the Lord is in the heart. In His outward circumstances the Lord was an outcast Man and lonely — the Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. In His pathway of perfect obedience to the Father's will, He abode in the constant realization of the Father's love and in that love He found the constant spring of all His joy. We too, in as far as we walk in obedience to the Lord, shall abide in the realization of His love, and, in the sunshine of His love we shall not only find His joy, but. a fulness of joy that leaves no room for grieving over the failure of all things earthly.

(Vv. 12, 13). Thirdly the new company is characterized by love. It is not only loved, but is a company that loves, for this is the Lord's command, "That ye love one another as I have loved you." This love is not to be after a human pattern, which oft-times is a selfish love; but a love that has no less standard than the Lord's love to us, a love in which there is nothing of self, for the Lord can say, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Here death is viewed, not in its atoning character, but, as the supreme expression of love. Earthly love is often drawn out by something in its object that is lovable. Divine love rises above all our weaknesses and failures and loves in spite of so much that is unlovely. Such is the love of Christ, and such is the love that we should cherish toward one another. A love that is not indifferent to failures and blemishes, but, rising above all that is unlovely, serves its object even to making the greatest possible sacrifice — the laying down of life for a friend. As one has said. "No greater proof of love can be given; no higher standard set."

(Vv. 14, 15). Fourthly the Christian company is a trusted company enriched with the confidences of Christ and the secret counsels of the Father's heart. The Lord treats His own not merely as servants, to whom directions are given, but as friends to whom secrets are communicated, for the Lord can say, "All things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you." It is not indeed that the disciples were not servants of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:1; Jude 1:1; Romans 1:1).

But they were more than servants, they were friends, and, if "the privilege of being servants is great, that of being friends is greater." The servant, as such, "knoweth not what His Lord doeth." He only knows the task allotted to him, and is only given the needed direction for its performance. The servant who is treated as a friend knows more; he is told the secret purpose of His Master for which the work is undertaken. And yet more, for a friend is one to whom we speak of our affairs knowing they will be of deepest interest to him though not directly concerning him. Thus it was that God treated Abraham — the man who is called the friend of God — He says "Shall I hide from Abraham the thing that I do." But again we see that obedience to the Lord's commands secures the place of a friend, as before it retained the enjoyment of love. We shall know little of the counsels of the Father's heart unless we walk in obedience to the Lord' commands. Being in the path of obedience the Lord treats us as friends by the confidences to which He admits us, communicating to us all that He has heard of the Father.

(V. 16). Fifthly the Christian company is a chosen company, as the Lord says, "Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you." The choice was on His side, not ours. Blessed that it is so: had we, in some moment of emotional enthusiasm, chosen the Lord as our Master to go and bring forth fruit, we should, under the stress of circumstances, long since have turned back. The volunteers, that at times crossed the path of the Lord, received but small encouragement, and went but a little way with One who had not where to lay His head, and was ever in reproach with men. But of those He called He could say, "Ye are they which have continued with Me in My temptations" (Luke 6:13; Luke 9:1; Luke 22:28). Here it is surely no question of the sovereign choice to eternal life, but the love that chose and ordained us to bring forth fruit on earth, and that the fruit should abide. Blessedly fulfilled in the Apostles, for the graces of Christ expressed in their lives have made them examples to the flock for all time.

(V. 16). Lastly the Christian company is a praying and dependent company having access to the Father in the name of Christ. Enjoying the love of Christ, and admitted to the confidences of Christ as His friends, they will be so instructed in His mind, that whatsoever they ask of the Father in the name of Christ, He will be able to give.

Such is the Christian circle according to the mind of the Lord. A circle in which all that is Christ's can be known and enjoyed, for how sweetly the little word "My" falls on our ears from the lips of the Lord. Connected with His own He can say, "My love," "My joy, "My commandments," "My friends, "My Father," and "My name." Here too, as one has said, is found the "whole history of love in the love of the Father to the Son, the love of Jesus to His people, the love of His people to one another; each stage being both the source and the standard of the next." The picture of the Christian company, as thus portrayed by the Lord, is indeed beautiful, but alas we seek in vain to find any general practical expression of the Lord's desires amongst His people. Even so, divided and scattered though we be, let us not order our walk by any lower standard but each seek individually to answer to the mind of the Lord.

(V. 17). "These things," of which the Lord has been speaking, were introduced with the love of Christ to His own; their end is to bind the disciples together in love to one another. Thus we can appreciate the fitness of the Lord's words. "These things I command you, that ye love one another " The World. John 15:18-25

Very blessedly, (V. 18, 19.) the Lord has presented to us the new Christian company, not indeed in its formation or administration (for this the time had not yet come), but, in its moral marks and spiritual privileges. It is seen as a company governed by the love of Christ and, abiding in His love, bound together by love to one another. In the words that follow, the Lord passes in thought outside the Christian circle of love to speak of the world circle of hate, thus warning His disciples of the true character of the world, by which they will be surrounded, and preparing them for its persecution.

If we share with Christ the love, joy, and holy intimacies of the inside circle, we must also be prepared to share with Christ in His hatred and reproach from the world. There is no suggestion that the disciples should attempt to make the best of two worlds, as men speak. It must be Christ or the world, it cannot be Christ and the world. A company that in any way exhibits the graces of Christ would be recognised by the world as identified with Christ, and the hatred which the world had expressed to Christ, would be shown to His people. His hatred, and His persecution, would be theirs. The world is a vast system embracing every race and class, and false religion, having in common their hatred of God. The world by which the disciples were immediately surrounded was the world of corrupt Judaism. To-day the world with which believers are mainly in contact is the world of corrupt Christendom. Its outward form may change from age to age; at heart it is ever marked by alienation from God and hatred to Christ.

Why should these simple men be hated by the world? Were they not mainly a company of poor people who loved one another, who lived in an orderly way, being subject to the powers, without interfering with their politics? Did they not go about proclaiming good news, and doing good deeds? Why should such be hated? The Lord gives two reasons for this hatred. First, they were a company of people that Christ had chosen out of the world: second, they were a company of people who confessed the name of Christ before the world (V. 21). The first cause would more particularly call forth the hatred of the religious world: the second the hatred of the world in general. Through all time nothing has so enraged religious man as the sovereign grace that, passing by all man’s religious efforts, picks up and blesses the outcast and the wretched. The very mention of the grace of other days, that blessed a Gentile widow, and a Gentile leper, led the religious leaders of Nazareth to rise up in wrath and hatred against Christ. The sovereign grace that blesses the younger son, enrages the elder son.

(V. 20, 21). Further the disciples are warned that this hatred will manifest itself in persecution, "If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you." This active expression of hatred is more directly connected with the confession of the name of Christ for the Lord can say, "All these things will they do unto you for My name’s sake." The persecution, whether of Christ or His disciples, proved the had no knowledge of the One that sent Christ — the Father.

(Vv. 22-25). There is, however, no excuse for such ignorance. The Lord’s words, and the Lord’s works, left the world without excuse either for hatred or ignorance. If Christ had not come and spoken unto the world words such as never man had spoken; if He had not done among them works which none other man had done, they could not have been reproached with the sin of wilful enmity against Christ and the Father. They would still have been fallen creatures. but it would hardly have been demonstrated that they were wilful and God-hating creatures. But now there was no cloak for their sin. There was no hiding the fact of the world’s guilt: it had come out. Christ had

fully revealed, by His words and works, all the Father’s heart. It only brought out man s hatred of God. The world as such was left without hope, for, according to their own law. they hated Christ without a cause. Thus the world’s hatred is no longer ignorance: it is sin. It is a causeless hatred. Alas! we, even as Christians. may at times give the world cause for hatred, but in Christ there was no cause. There is, indeed, a cause for the hatred but it lies not in the One that is hated. but in the hearts of those who hate. The Power for Witnessing. John 15:26-27

If the circle of love is surrounded by a circle of hate — a persecuting world that hates the disciples of Christ with a blind hatred — how will any testimony for Christ be maintained on the earth, when Christ Himself has gone? The Christian circle is small, and those who compose it are weak. The Lord Himself likens it to a little flock in the midst of wolves. By what power then will the disciples stand against a Christ-hating world and bear witness for Christ? They can stand, and they will stand in the mighty power of the Holy Spirit, a divine Person who will come from the Father.

How well the Lord knew the terrible character of the world and its relentless hatred for had not the storm of its enmity broken in its full fury upon Him? He knew well, too, the weakness of those who loved Him and had followed Him, for was not Peter going to deny Him, and all forsake Him? How well He knew that left to themselves, they would never be able to maintain any testimony for Him, when He had left them for the glory. Knowing the wickedness of the world and the weakness of the disciples He says, "I will send" unto you the Comforter "from the Father even the Spirit of truth," and the Lord adds "He shall testify of Me." However weak the disciples may be, however strong the world may be, "He shall testify of Me." However much the disciples may fail, however much the world may persecute, "He shall testify of Me." He will testify on earth of the glory of the Son in heaven. The world will crucify Him in the lowest place on earth, heaven will crown Him in the highest place in glory, and the Holy Spirit would come to bear witness of His glory. The Son had come from the Father to bear witness of the Father: the Holy Spirit was coming from the Father to bear witness to the Son. In view of the coming of the Spirit the Lord can add, "Ye also shall bear witness," and gives as a further reason, "Because ye have been with Me from the beginning." It is true we have not been with Jesus in the same literal sense in which the disciples had companied with Him from the beginning of His ministry, nevertheless, it remains true in a moral sense, that, if we are to bear witness for Christ before men we too must be with Christ in secret. When the Holy Spirit had come, Peter and John bore such a striking witness to Christ before the persecuting religious world, that their persecutors "took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus"

Thus the Lord brings us two great facts, one that the Holy Spirit bears testimony to Christ in the glory; the other, that the disciples bear witness before men. Are not these two facts strikingly illustrated in the history of Stephen. Surrounded by a Christ-rejecting religious world, maddened by hatred, gnashing upon him with their teeth, and persecuting him with their stones, he stands firm in the mighty power of the Holy Spirit, and, looking up into heaven, sees the glory of God and Jesus; then he bears witness before the world, "Behold," he says, "I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God." The Holy Spirit bears testimony in Stephen’s spirit to Christ in the glory, and Stephen bears witness before the world.

Stephen was the first of a long line of martyrs, but in spite of all that the world has done, or will yet do, we may with all confidence say there has been. and will be, a witness for Christ while the Christian company is on earth. for the one great reason that the Holy Spirit is present on earth and

abides in and with God’s people in all His mighty and irresistible power. THE WITNESS.

"If ye abide in Me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples" — John 15:7-8.

Would’st thou a witness for thy Saviour be, In word and life, to men on every hand, While passing through a dark and dreary land;

Then hear the Master’s word, ’Abide in Me, And ever let My words abide in thee.’

Thus walking in the sunshine of His face, Show forth the beauty of His lowly grace; That others, in the daily round may see, In one who treads in peace the pilgrim way, Some heavenly fruit brought forth from day to day: That from the fulness of thy life may flow Love, kindness, humbleness of mind, That thou, in passing through this world may show The loveliness of Christ before mankind.

John 16:1-33 The Introduction In meditating upon the last words of the Lord Jesus, recorded in John 13:1-38, John 14:1-31, John 15:1-27, John 16:1-33, we must ever remember that the Lord has in view the preparation of His own to bear witness to Himself in the place of His rejection, during the time of His absence. For the accomplishment of this great end we have seen, in the former discourses, the necessity for having our feet washed (John 13:1-38), our hearts comforted and linked with divine Persons (John 14:1-31), and our lives setting forth the character of Christ while our lips are opened to witness for Christ (John 15:1-27). Finally, in this last discourse, our minds are instructed so that we may render intelligent service, and not be stumbled by the treatment we may receive at the hands of a religious, but Christ-rejecting, world.

Instruction in the mind of Christ is the great underlying object of this last discourse. In the service of the Lord there may be much zeal yet not according to knowledge, and hence little result and much disappointment. How important then to have the mind of the Lord. The instruction of the discourse is presented in the following order: —

Firstly, we are forewarned as to the treatment that will be meted out by the religious world to those who bear witness to Christ (1-4).

Secondly, we learn that in order to be intelligent in the mind of Christ, it is necessary that Christ should go to the Father and that the Comforter should come (5-7).

Thirdly, when the Spirit comes, believers will be instructed in the true character of this present evil world (8-11).

Fourthly, by the Holy Spirit believers are led into the knowledge of another world — the world to come (12-15).

Lastly, believers are instructed as to the true character of the new day about to dawn (16-33).

Persecution from the Religious World. John 16:1-4 In the previous discourse the Lord had set before His disciples the marks of the new Christian company, whose privilege it would be to bear fruit for the Father, and bear witness to Christ in a world from which Christ is absent.

(V. 1). Those, however, who, in any measure, wear the character of Christ, and bear witness to Christ in a Christ-hating world. will assuredly have to face something of the suffering, and persecution, that is brought before us in the opening verses of this chapter. The thoughtful and tender love of the Lord, anticipating the suffering of His own, gives them this loving warning lest, when persecution arose, they might be offended. If unwarned their natural prejudices, formed by their links with the dispensation that was closing, together with their ignorance of the new Christian era about to dawn, might become a cause of stumbling when faced with persecution. How needed the warning, the after-history of the disciples will prove.

John the Baptist, in his day, came nigh to being offended. His faith received a severe shock by treatment that was so foreign to his thoughts. As the result of his faithful witness he finds himself in prison, and, being ignorant of the mind of the Lord, he sends a message to the Lord, "Art Thou He that should come," to receive the answer, "Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me." With this danger the disciples were faced. Filled with the false hope of the immediate redemption of Israel, they would hardly be prepared for persecution from Israel. Their false expectations exposed them to the danger of being offended.

(Vv. 2, 3). The Lord’s warning prepares them not only for persecution, but for religious persecution. The disciples of Christ would be put out of the synagogue, involving the loss of all fellowship whether in the family, social or political circle (John 9:22). This religious persecution would proceed from religious motives. "Whosoever killeth you will think that He doeth God service." Hence the greater the sincerity, the more ruthless the persecution. But this persecution would proceed from ignorance of the Father and the Son. And thus it has been with every form of religious persecution. It has been truly said, "As it was with the Jews who persecuted Christians, so with the Christians who have persecuted Christians. Things have been done ’to the glory of God,’ and ’in the name of Christ,’ of which He who looks down from heaven would only say, ’They have not known the Father nor Me.’"

(V. 4). In the days to come the persecution would become an occasion of recalling the Lord’s words and comforting the disciples’ hearts with a fresh sense of the omniscience that foreknew, and the love that forewarned. Hitherto the necessity to speak of these things had not arisen, for the Lord was present to shelter and guard them. These things belonged to the time of His absence, not the time of His presence. The Necessity of Christ’s Departure. John 16:5-7

If, however, the disciples were to be instructed in the mind of the Lord, it was necessary that He should depart and that the Comforter should come. The Lord recognised their affection for Himself, and in tenderness felt for them in the sorrow that filled their hearts as they thought of the parting with Himself. Nevertheless, knowing the immense benefit they would derive from the coming of the Spirit, He can say, "It is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you." We may be slow to realize the immense blessing to ourselves. and the glory to Christ, that flows from the presence of the Spirit, but it should raise our esteem for the gift of the Spirit when we see in what high estimation the gift of the Spirit was held by the Lord. Blessed indeed must have been the company of the Lord in His earthly pathway; blessed to see His works of power and hear His words of love, behold His excellencies and experience His care, nevertheless His going away would be greater gain, for by the coming of the Spirit believers can be lead into a yet deeper acquaintance with Christ, a richer appreciation of His excellencies, and,

above all. the knowledge of Christ in exaltation as a Man in the glory. To know Christ in the glory by the Spirit, must be far more blessed than the knowledge of Christ on earth after the flesh. It involves a union with Christ in resurrection impossible while He was present on earth. Union with a Man in Heaven is more blessed than company with a Man on earth. Yet occupation with the immediate sorrow of losing the Lord, blinded the disciples to the blessing that God had for them through the sorrow.

We may gather from this a principle of wide application — that, pre-occupation with present circumstances hides from us God's purposes of future blessing, wrought out through the sorrowful circumstances. The disciples' pre-occupation with their immediate sorrow hid from their eyes the great fact that, by the departure of the Lord, He was going to open a way into the unfolding of all the vast counsels of God for the glory of Christ and the blessing of His people.

It is often thus with ourselves. Pre-occupied with some present painful circumstances, we overlook the blessing and enlargement of soul into which God has purposed to lead us through these very circumstances. We forget that word which says, "Thou hast enlarged me, when I was in distress" (Psalms 4:1). The Present World Exposed. John 16:8-11 From this point in the discourse, the Lord resumes the instruction of the last two verses of John 15:1-27 in reference to the coming of the Holy Spirit. In the intervening verses the Lord had spoken of the witness of the disciples and the persecution it would involve. He resumes this great theme with the words, "When He is come," an expression used before in John 15:26, and again in John 14:13. In each case it marks a fresh stage of instruction. In John 16:8, His coming demonstrates the true character of the world. In John 16:13, He comes to guide the believer into the truth of another world.

Before that other world is revealed the true character of this world is exposed, and so we read, "When He is come He will bring demonstration to the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." No question is raised as to who receives the demonstration, but the fact is stated that the presence of the Holy Spirit demonstrates the true character of the world. As a matter of fact it is not the world, as such, that receives the demonstration, but those in whom the Spirit dwells, though they indeed use what they have learned to witness to the world of its true condition. The presence of the Spirit does not test the world. The world has been fully tested by the presence of Christ. He was here in such manner that the world could see His works of grace and hear His words of love; and the Lord sums up the result of this testing by saying, "They have both seen and hated both Me and My Father." When the Spirit comes the world cannot receive Him, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him. Nevertheless to believers — those in whom He dwells — He brings demonstration of the result of the testing, so that the believers, instructed by the Spirit, have no false conceptions of the world. They know by the Spirit's teaching the true character of the world as seen by God. Its character is demonstrated in respect of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. This conviction is wrought in the soul, not by the use of abstract statements, but by an appeal to the Lord Jesus and the great facts of His history.

First, its state is proved in respect of sin. The presence of the Spirit is in itself a proof of the evil state of the world, for if Christ had not been rejected the Holy Spirit would not be here. His presence is a proof that the world has hated, cast out, and crucified the Son of God. Jew and Gentile, representing the world religiously and politically, combined in saying, "Away with Him, crucify Him." It is therefore a world that does not believe in Christ, and this solemn fact proves it is

under sin. We might understand the world not believing in anyone else, but if the world does not believe in Christ - One with whom they could find no fault — it is a clear proof that it must be dominated by an evil principle which God calls sin. The final and absolute demonstration that the world is under sin is seen, not in the fact that men have transgressed certain laws of God, or defiled the temple and stoned the prophets, but in that, when God was manifested down here in all the grace, love, power and goodness on behalf of guilty man, as set forth in the Son become flesh and dwelling amongst men, the world finally and formally rejected God by refusing to believe in His Son. This is the outstanding fact that demonstrates the sin of the world. However fair the exterior of this world may look at times, whatever advances it may make in civilization and invention, the fact remains that the presence of the Spirit proves that it is a world that does not believe in Christ. and therefore a world under sin.

Secondly, the evil condition of the world is proved in respect of righteousness. The presence of the Spirit proves not only the absence of Christ from the world, but also the presence of Christ in the glory. If Christ's absence is the greatest proof of sin, His presence in the glory is the greatest expression of righteousness. The sin of men rose to its height when the world put the sinless One upon the Cross. Righteousness is seen, on the one hand, in that Christ, who was nailed to the Cross, has gone back to the Father; and on the other hand, in that the world as such will see Him no more. It is only right that He should have the highest place in the glory: it is only right that the world that saw and hated Him without a cause, should see Him no more. Thus it is demonstrated that the world is under sin and without righteousness.

Thirdly, the Spirit brings demonstration of judgment because the prince of this world is judged. Behind the sin of man there is the craft of Satan. Man is but the tool of the devil: God has counselled to set Christ in the place of supreme power in the universe. The devil has set himself to thwart the purposes of God; and from the garden of Eden to the Cross at Calvary he has used man as his tool to carry out his plans. At the Cross it looked as if the devil had triumphed, for there he succeeded in using man to nail to the cross of shame the very One that God has destined for a throne of glory. But the presence of the Spirit brings demonstration that, in spite of all that the world, moved by the prince of the world, has done, Christ is in the highest place in glory. God has triumphed over man's sin and the devil's power. The place of glory in which Christ is set is the proof that the devil has been defeated in the greatest expression of his power. This must mean the final and absolute judgment of the devil; and if the devil is judged the whole world system of which he is the ruler, will come under judgment. The judgment is not yet executed, but morally it stands condemned with its ruler.

Such then is the state of the world under the eye of God, demonstrated by the presence of the Spirit. It is a world under sin,, without righteousness and going on to judgment. The World to Come Revealed. John 16:12-15

Leaving the present world the Lord passes in thought into a region of which He has many things to say, though, at the moment, beyond the capacity of the disciples to comprehend. Howbeit when the Spirit of truth is come, He will unfold to the disciples "things to come." "He will guide into all truth." If we are to be faithful witnesses for Christ in this world, it is not enough to know the true character of this present world, we must also have the light of another world to guide our steps through this dark world.

While, however, the Spirit brings to light the glories of the new world, He does not bring them into actual display. Christ, Himself, when He comes, will bring these glorious things into display. By the Spirit, faith walks in the present light of future glories. The morning Star arises in our hearts before the Son of righteousness shines forth upon the world.

Moreover the Lord does not suggest that the coming of the Spirit of truth would alter the course of this present world. His presence condemns the world. His guiding delivers believers from present things by giving us the light of things to come. Alas! many may seek to use Christianity for the betterment of this world, only to find that such efforts result in Christianity being corrupted, and the evil of the world being glossed over with a religious veneer. Nor does the Lord suggest that the coming of the Spirit would ensure the worldly comfort and earthly prosperity of His people while passing through this world. There may often be great disparity among the Lord's people as to their circumstances and surroundings in this world, but, as egards the true riches of the world of the Father's counsels they are on common ground. The present fight of the world of glory is the portion of all the saints. Whatever our circumstances in this life, it is at least open to us to enter into and enjoy, in spirit, the surpassing and eternal glories of the world to come, into which we shall so soon actually enter. In view of carrying our hearts into this new world we read that the Holy Spirit will guide us into all the truth. The full range of truth, as to the purpose of God. the glory of Christ in the Church, the blessing of the Church with Christ, and the blessing of men in the Kingdom throughout Millennial days, right on to the glories of the new heaven and the new earth, is available for us in the power of the Holy Spirit. Into this vast range of truth He will guide us; but He will not force, nor drive us. The question for each one is, as with Rebekah of old "Wilt thou go?" The servant was present ready to lead her to Isaac, even as the Spirit has come to lead us to Christ. The servant could say, "Hinder me not . . . that I may go to my master," and may we not say the desire of the Holy Spirit is, not to better this world or settle the saints in this scene, but to return to the One from whom He has come, taking with Him the Bride for Christ. Alas! we often hinder the Holy Spirit by turning aside into some path of our own choosing and thus lose the guiding of the Holy Spirit. Some worldly entanglement, or some wrong religious association, may detain us, and until clear of this association the Spirit will cease to guide us into further truth. Christians appear to have little conception how easily the soul's progress into truth may be hindered by unscriptural associations. Not only does the Lord say the Spirit will guide, but three times He says, "He will show." (Vv. 13, 14, 15). We cannot guide ourselves into all truth, we cannot show ourselves the things to come, or the things concerning Christ. We are entirely dependent upon the Spirit. How deeply important then to refuse at all cost anything that would hinder the Spirit leading us into the fulness of blessing.

Very explicitly the Lord tells us the threefold character of the blessing into which the Holy Spirit will lead us. First, verse 13 speaks of "things to come;" then, in verse 14, we read of the glories of Christ; finally, in verse 15, there passes before us, "All things that the Father hath." These are the things into which the Holy Spirit will guide us if we hinder Him not. He will unroll before us all the blessedness of the world to come; He will take of the glories of Christ and show them unto us, He will disclose to us the whole range of the Father's counsels which have Christ for their centre. Would that we realised more fully that there is a world of bliss entirely outside the sphere of natural sight, and beyond the range of the human mind — things of which it is said, "Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for

them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit; for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (1 Corinthians 2:9-10). The New Day. John 16:16-33 The Lord has finished the portion of His discourse that unfolds to the disciples the great illumination of mind that will result from the coming of the Holy Spirit. Now, as the discourses draw to their close, He speaks no longer of the Spirit, but of "that day" — the new day about to dawn — with its new revelation of Himself in resurrection (16-22); the new character of intercourse they would have with the Father (23, 24), and the new form in which the Lord would communicate with them (25-28).

We do well to remember that the two events that distinguish "that day" are, the departure of Christ to be with the Father and the coming of the Spirit to dwell in believers. In the portion of the discourse that has just closed, "that day" is viewed in connection with the coming of the Comforter. In this latter portion of the discourse, "that day" is viewed in connection with Christ going to the Father, and all that is involved in His being with the Father.

(V. 16). Wonderful intimations of coming glories to be revealed in the power of the Spirit, have passed before the disciples, but, as the last moments with the disciples slip away, they are left with Jesus Himself as the Object of their affections. The Spirit will indeed draw out these affections, but never is He, like Jesus, the object of them. Thus it is that the Lord engages their hearts with Himself, as He says, "A little while, and ye shall not see Me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see Me." In these words not only does the Lord engage their hearts with Himself, but He intimates the great events so close at hand, and prepares their hearts for the changes these events would bring.

(Vv. 17, 18). The Lord’s words raise anxious enquiry amongst the disciples, making manifest that every statement was to them a mystery. It is noticeable that as the discourses proceed the disciples grow silent. Five of the disciples have spoken on occasions, but since leaving the upper room no other voice save the Lord’s has been heard. As the great truths of the coming of the Spirit were unfolded, they had listened in silence to that which was so far beyond their comprehension. Now, as the Lord again speaks of Himself, their hearts are stirred to know the meaning of His words. Yet, even so, they speak among themselves, hesitating to utter their difficulties to the Lord.

(Vv. 19-22). The Lord anticipates their desire to ask the meaning of His words, and not only throws further light upon what He has said, but also tells them how their hearts would be affected, both in sorrow and joy, by the great events so close at hand. The Lord’s words clearly speak of two short intervals of time, and intimate that soon the disciples would not see Him, and then that they would see Him again. In the light of the events that follow can we not say that these words indicate that, at that moment, there were but a few short hours before the Lord would leave His disciples to pass out of the sight of man, as He goes into the darkness of the Cross and the tomb? Again after a second "little while" the disciples would see the Lord, and yet not as before, in the days of His flesh. but in resurrection. If they would see Him no more as in the days of His humiliation, they would see Him for evermore in the new and glorious resurrection condition beyond death and the grave. It would however, be the same Jesus, who had dwelt among them, borne with their weakness, sustained their faith, and won their hearts, that would come into their midst and say, "Behold My hands and My feet that it is I Myself."

Moreover the Lord tells His disciples how these changing events will effect them in sorrow and joy. The little while during which they will not see Him, will be a time of overwhelming grief for the

disciples — a time of weeping and lamenting for one dead, whose grave was the end of all their earthly hopes. The world, indeed, would rejoice, thinking they had triumphed over One whose presence exposed the evil of their deeds. Nevertheless, when the little while is ended, their sorrow will be turned to joy. To bring home to the hearts of the disciples these coming events, the Lord uses the illustration of the woman bringing forth her child. The sudden sorrow, the change from anguish to joy, and the birth of the child, exactly sets forth the sudden anguish which would overwhelm the disciples when the Lord has passed into death, even as it illustrates the quick change from anguish to joy, when once again they see the risen Lord as the Firstborn from the dead. The Lord, in applying His illustration, enlarges upon His words. Already He has said, "Ye shall see Me," now He adds, "I will see you again." The world would not see Him nor would He see the world again. It is to His own that He would come. And so it came to pass, as we read, later on, "Jesus stood in the midst and said unto them, Peace be unto you and when He had so said He showed them His hands and His side. Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord" (John 20:19-20).

Moreover, the seeing of which the Lord speaks can hardly be confined to the fleeting visits during the forty days after the resurrection. It has been well said, "The risen and living Lord showed Himself to the eye of sense, that He might remain before the eye of faith, not as a memory but as a presence," and again, "It was a seeing that could never be lost or dimmed, but on the contrary grew clearer as it became more spiritual." Throughout the time of His absence, while we are yet on earth, and He in the glory. the words of the Lord will ever be true, "Ye shall see Me," and "I will see you." Looking steadfastly into that glory, Stephen can say, "Behold. I see the heavens opened. and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God." Again, the writer to the Hebrews can say, "We see Jesus . . . crowned with glory and honour.

It is this special vision of Christ that secures the joy of the believer. "The living Lord is the joy of His people; and because His life is eternal, their joy is permanent and secure." Thus the Lord can say "Your joy no man taketh from you."

(Vv. 23, 24). The Lord has spoken of the new revelation of Himself in the new day so soon to dawn; now He speaks of the new character of intercourse that would become the new day. "In that day," says the Lord, "ye shall ask Me nothing" — words that do not imply that we are never to address the Lord, but rather that we have direct access to the Father. Martha had no sense of directly speaking to the Father, when she said, "I know that . . . whatsoever Thou wilt ask of God, God will give it Thee." (John 11:22). We have not now to appeal to the Lord to go to the Father on our behalf, but it is our privilege to directly ask of the Father in the name of Christ. Hitherto the disciples had asked nothing in His name. "In that day" they shall ask in His name, and the Father would give in His name, that their joy might be full. In using the vast resources thus opened to them they would find fulness of joy.

(V. 25). Furthermore, on the Lord’s side. His communications would take a new character. Hitherto much of His teaching had been given in the form of parables or allegories. In the day about to dawn He would speak plainly of the Father. Thus it was in the resurrection, when He sent a message to the disciples plainly saying, "I ascend unto My Father, and your Father. and to My God. and your God."

(Vv. 26. 28). Though the Lord will plainly tells us of the Father it will not be necessary for the Lord to pray the Father concerning us. as if the Father did not know our needs, or that we had not free access to the Father, for says the Lord, "The Father Himself loveth you." The Father has the deepest interest in the disciples, and loves them, because they loved Christ and believed that He had come forth from God. The Lord closes this part of the discourse by affirming the great truths upon which the whole superstructure of Christianity is based, "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world; again I leave the world and go to the Father." Alas! professing Christendom, while affecting to make much of the perfect life of our Lord, is fast giving up the holy claims implied in this great affirmation. This assertion of His divine origin, of His mission in the world, and His return to the Father, fittingly brings the instruction of the discourses to their end.

(V. 27-32). The closing words are not so much instruction as a final word of warning as to the weakness of the disciples, followed by a word that reveals the feelings of the Lord's heart, and the last word of encouragement. The disciples, in the presence of this plain affirmation of the truth, can say, "Lo, now speakest Thou plainly and speakest no allegory." The truth that they had seen but dimly, now becomes definite and clear by the plain words of the Lord. And yet how little they understood the way of death by which the Lord was returning to the Father. Thus the Lord can say, "Do ye now believe?" They did indeed believe, but, like ourselves, too often, they but little knew their own weakness. The Lord has to warn them that the hour was coming, yea had indeed come, when all the disciples would be scattered every man to his own, and the One in whom they had just professed to believe, would be left alone.

Yet if there comes a time when these companions of His life, who have loved and followed Him, think only of themselves and flee from Him in the hour of His trial, He will not be alone, for, as the Lord says, "the Father is with Me." He does not say the Father will be with Me, however true, but "the Father is with Me." As in the days of old, in the scene which was but a shadow of this far greater scene, we read of Abraham and Isaac. as they took their way to Mount Moriah, "they went both of them together" (Genesis 22:6). So now the Father and the Son are together, as the great sacrifice is approached.

(V. 33). Nevertheless, if the Lord will warn the disciples of their weakness, He will not leave them without one last word of cheer and encouragement. Whatever failure in themselves they may have lo deplore, whatever trials in the world they may have to meet, yet, in Christ they would have peace. They may find much in themselves, and much in the world to disturb them, but in Christ they would have an unfailing resource — One in whom their hearts could rest in perfect peace. The world may indeed overcome the disciples, as they are shortly to prove, but Christ has overcome the world.

Thus the disciples, and ourselves. may be of good cheer, for the One who loves us, who lives for us, who is coming for us — the One who is with us — is the One who has overcome the world. Thus as the great discourses reach their end we are left with a word of encouragement that, lifting us above all our failure, leaves us in the contemplation of the victors of the Lord.

We triumph in Thy triumphs, Lord:

Thy joys our deepest joys afford, The fruit of love divine.

While sorrowing, suffering, toiling here, How does the thought our spirits cheer, The throne of glory’s Thine. THE HOPE.

"Look up, and lift up your heads: for your redemption draweth nigh" — Luke 21:28.

There is a world beyond this world of sight, No eye hath seen, nor heart of man conceived, For those who in the Saviour have believed: A home of everlasting love and light; A day of joy that ends the long dark night; A rich reward, for those who suffered loss; The Lord’s ’Well done,’ for those who bore their cross; The victor’s crown for those who fought the fight.

Then art thou faint and weary by the way?

Lift up thy head, and hear the Master say, ’I am the Morning Star, the hope of dawn, I quickly come, to call on high My own, From shades of night into the cloudless morn, To see Me face to face, and know as known.’

John 17:1-26 The Introduction. The gracious ministry of Christ, before the world, is over. The loving discourses with the disciples are finished. All being closed on earth, the Lord looks heavenward toward that home into which He will so soon enter. We have listened to the words of the Lord as He spoke to the disciples of the Father; now it is our greater privilege to listen to the words of the Son, as He speaks to the Father concerning His disciples. The prayer stands alone among all prayers by reason of the glorious Person by whom it is uttered. Who but a divine Person could say "That they may be one as we" (11), and again, "That they may be one in us" (21). Such utterances could never fall from human lips. Deny the deity of His Person, and these words would become the blasphemies of an impostor. The prayer is alone. too, by reason of its unique character. It has been pointed out that, "It has no voice of confession . . . no echo. however distant, of recognition of sin, no tone that is touched with a feeling of demerit or defect.... no intimation of inferiority or entreaty for help."

We are moreover arrested by its comprehensiveness. We listen to One who speaks of an eternity before the foundation of the world. as having had part in that glorious past. We hear Him speak of His perfect pathway upon earth: we are carried on to the Apostolic days by One to whom the future is an open book. We listen to words which cover the whole period of the Church’s pilgrimage on earth, as we hear the Lord’s desires for those who will believe on Him through the Apostles’ words. Finally we are carried in thought to an eternity yet to come, when we shall be with Christ, and like Christ.

Furthermore, as we listen to these heart-breathings of the Lord we feel that. while our passage through this world is still in view, yet we are carried beyond the passing things of time to contemplate the changeless things of eternity. However needful feet-washing. however blessed fruit-bearing, however great the privilege to testify, and suffer, for Christ, yet such things are hardly in view, but rather, those greater things which, while they may be known and enjoyed in time, belong to eternity. Life eternal. the Father’s name, the Father’s words, the Father’s love, the joy of Christ, holiness, unity and glory, are eternal things which will abide when time, with its need of feet-washing, its opportunities for service, its trials and its sufferings, will for ever have passed away.

Moreover, as we listen to this prayer we learn the desires of the heart of Christ. so that the believer can say, "I know the desires of His heart for me. This must be so. for perfect prayer is the expression of the heart's desire. Alas! with ourselves our prayers may often become formal and. as such, only the expression of what we like others to think is the desire of our hearts. No element of formality enters into this prayer. All is as perfect as the One who prays. In the course of the prayer many requests are offered to the Father, but they all appear to fall under three dominant desires of the Lord which mark the main divisions of the prayer.

First, the desire that the Father may be glorified in the Son Verses 1 to 5.

Second. the desire that Christ may be glorified in the saints. Verses 6-21.

Third, the desire that the Saints may be glorified with Christ. Verses 22-26. The Father Glorified in the Son. John 17:1-5

Every utterance, and every request, in the first five verses of chapter 17 has in view the glory of the Father. Wherever the Son is viewed, whether on earth, in heaven, or on the cross — between earth and heaven, His first and great desire is to glorify the Father. Such purity of motive is beyond the conception of fallen man. The natural thought is to use power, whatever form it may take, to glorify self. Such was the thought of His brethren, after the flesh, when they said, "If Thou do these things show Thyself to the world" (John 7:4). What is this but saying in effect, "Use your power to glorify yourself?" Alas! does not history show that whenever man is entrusted with power, whether by God or his fellow men, he uses it to glorify himself? Entrusted with power, the first head of the Gentiles encompasses his fall by saying, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty" (Daniel 4:30 N. Tr.). Well may all heaven unite to say, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power," for He alone uses power for the glory of God, and the blessing of man The Lord desires a glory far greater than this world can give, for He says, "O Father, glorify Me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was." And with this great glory He desires that He may glorify the Father.

(V. 2). Power had already been given to Him on earth, displayed in the raising of Lazarus, and used to the glory of God, was He said at the grave side, "If thou wouldest believe thou shouldest see the glory of God" (John 11:40). Now the Lord asks for a glory that would be commensurate with His power. Power had been given Him over all flesh, that He should glorify God by carrying out the counsels of God. In this world we see the terrible power of the flesh energised by Satan, yet, for our comfort, we know from this prayer, that a power above every other power has been given to the Lord so that no power of evil, however great, can hinder Christ from carrying into effect the counsels of God to give eternal life to as many as the Father has given to the Son.

(V. 3). This life finds its highest expression in the knowledge and enjoyment of our relationships with the Father and the Son. It is not like the natural life, limited to the knowledge and enjoyment of natural things and human relationships: it is not confined to earth nor bound by time, nor ended by death. It is a life that enables us to know and enjoy communion with divine Persons. It carries us outside the world, above the earth, beyond time, and into the regions of eternal glory.

(V. 4). If, however, the Lord desires to glorify the Father in the new place in heaven, already He has done so in His path on earth, and in His sufferings on the cross. Who but the Lord could look

up to heaven and say to the Father, "I have glorified Thee on the earth." Alas! fallen man has dishonoured God on the earth. Man was made in the image and likeness of God, to be a true representative of God before the universe. If however, now that man has fallen, the world were to form its ideas of God from man, the conclusion would be reached that God is an unholy, selfish, cruel and vindictive Being, without wisdom, love, or compassion. This indeed is the terrible conclusion that the heathen has reached, through presuming that God is such an one as themselves. Thus they have fashioned gods that, like themselves, are filthy, cruel, and selfish. They have "changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man." Thus instead of glorifying God by a true representation of God, man has dishonoured God on the earth. When, however, we turn from man fallen to the Man Christ Jesus — the Son — we see One who, in every step of His path, has glorified God. Born into this world, the heavenly host can say, as they gaze upon their Maker, "Glory to God in the highest." Now, at the completion of His path, the Lord can say, "I have glorified Thee on the earth." He fully set forth the character of God and fully maintained all that was due to God He upheld His glory before the whole universe. In Christ God was manifest in flesh, seen of angels as well as seen of man.

Moreover Christ not only glorified God in His path on earth, but above all, He glorified God on the Cross, for He can say, "I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do." There He maintained the righteousness of God in relation to sin, and displayed the love of God to the sinner.

Here Christ speaks according to the perfect Manhood He had taken. As Man He had glorified God, and finished the work given Him to do. As believers it is our privilege to walk as He walked — to be here for the glory of God and to finish the work given us to do, though never forgetting that the work He came to do at the Cross must for ever stand alone. None but the Son could undertake, and finish, that great work.

(V. 5). In verse 5 we listen to requests in which no man can have part, for here the Lord speaks as the eternal Son. and makes requests in which only One who is God can have His part. First the Lord can say, "O Father glorify Thou Me." We may indeed desire to have our bodies of glory, that Christ may be glorified in us (2 Thessalonians 1:10), and thus say "Glorify Christ in me," but who save a divine Person could say, "Glorify Me?"

Secondly, the prayer rises to a higher plane, for the Lord adds, "With thine own self." Only the Eternal Son, who dwelt in the bosom of the Father could ask for glory commensurate with the glory of the Father. The One who speaks thus claims equality with the Father.

Moreover, when the Lord proceeds to speak of "the glory which I had," He claims a glory which He possessed in eternity as a divine Person — not a glory that He received, but a glory that He had. Then He can say "the glory which I had with Thee," an expression which involves not only that He was a divine Person, but also a distinct Person in the Godhead. Finally He speaks of this glory as the glory He had with the Father "before the world was." It was outside of time; it belonged to eternity. He was a divine Person, a distinct Person in the Godhead, and He was an Eternal Person. It has been truly said, "We hear Him speaking in full consciousness of being the same before the world was and now, and of a glory which He had as His own in the eternal fellowship with God."

Christ Glorified in the Saints. John 17:6-21 The first and pre-eminent desire of the heart of Christ is to secure the glory of the Father. This is the great object in the first portion of the prayer. The second desire of the heart of Christ is that He, Himself, may be glorified in His saints, as He can say, "I am glorified in them" (10). This desire, apparently, underlies the requests in this fresh portion of the prayer. The Lord in His path on earth had glorified the Father in heaven. Now, as He takes His place in heaven, He desires that His disciples should glorify Him in their path on earth. In order to give effect to this desire, He very blessedly sets the feet of His disciples in the path that His feet had trodden. before the Father.

(Vv. 6-8). In the opening verses of this part of the prayer the Lord designates those for whom He prays, and presents the characteristics that endear them to Himself and call forth His prayer on their behalf.

First, they are a company of people who have been drawn out of the world, and given to Christ by the Father, and hence loved by Christ as a gift from the Father.

Second, they are a company to whom the Lord had manifested the Father’s name. In Scripture a name sets forth all that a person is. When Moses is sent by Jehovah to Israel, he says they will ask, "What is His name?" This amounts to saying, "If I tell them your name they will know who you are." So the manifestation of the Father’s name is the declaration of all that the Father is.

Third, not only had the Lord declared the Father, but He had given to His disciples the "words" which the Father had given Him. He shared with them the communications that He had received from the Father, so that they not only learn who the Father is in all His love and holiness, but, through the "words," they learn the Father’s mind. If the "word" reveals who He is, the "words" reveal His mind and thoughts.

Further they are a company who by grace had responded to these revelations, and thus the Lord can say of them, "They have kept Thy word:" "They have known that all things whatsoever Thou hast given Me are of Thee:" "They have received" the words: they "have known surely that I came out from Thee;" and lastly "they have believed that Thou didst send Me."

(V. 9-11). Having thus designated those for whom He prays, the Lord very blessedly intimates why He prays for them. Ever thinking of the Father, the Lord states "they are Thine" as His first reason for praying for them. Already the Lord has said, "Thine they were, and Thou gavest them Me," but He can still say "they are Thine." They did not cease to be the Father’s, because the Father gave them to the Son, for the Lord adds, "All mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine." Rich with meaning is this double statement, for, as Luther has been reported to have said, "Any one might justly say to God ’All that is mine is Thine,’ but no created being could go on to say, ’And all that is Thine is mine.’ This is a word for Christ alone."

Then, as a second great reason for praying for His disciples, the Lord adds, "I am glorified in them." We are left in this world to represent the One who has gone to glory, and the measure in which Christ is seen in His people, is the measure in which He is glorified before the world.

Moreover, there is yet another reason that calls forth the Lord’s prayer. Christ is no more in the world to protect His own by His actual presence with them. He is going to the Father, while His own are left behind in the midst of an evil and Christ-hating world. How great then will be their

need of the Lord’s prayer on their behalf.

(V. 11). In the latter half of verse eleven we pass from hearing the reasons for the Lord’s prayer, to listening to the definite requests that the Lord makes to the Father. These petitions are fourfold. First, that His disciples may be kept in holiness, second, that they may be one; third, that they may be kept from evil; lastly, that they may be sanctified. At once we can appreciate how necessary are these requests, for if Christ is to be glorified in His own how needful that they should be holy in nature, united in heart separate from evil, and sanctified to the Lord’s use. The first request is that the disciples may be kept in accord with the name of the Holy Father. This involves our maintenance in the holiness that His nature demands. Peter, in his epistle, may have had this request in his mind, when he exhorted those who call on the Father to be holy in all manner of conversation. The Lord’s second desire is expressed in the words, "that they may be one as We." It is important to remember that holiness comes before unity, for there is the danger of seeking unity at the expense of holiness. This is the first of the three "unities" to which the Lord refers in the course of the prayer. It is primarily the unity of the Apostles. The Lord desires that they may be "one as We." This is a unity of aim, thought, and purpose, such as existed between the Father and the Son.

(Vv. 12-14). Between the second and third requests we are permitted to hear the Lord presenting to the Father the reasons for His intercession. While in the world He had kept His disciples in the Father’s name, and guarded them from all the power of the enemy. Now that the Lord was going to the Father, He permits us to hear His words so that we may know His guardianship does not cease, though its method is changed. Before He goes to the Father He would have us know that we are put into the Father’s loving care. This would lead to Christ’s joy being fulfilled in the disciples. Even as the Lord had walked in the unclouded enjoyment of the Father’s love, so He would have us to walk in the joy of knowing we are under the care of the Father, who loves us with the eternal and unchanging love wherewith He loves the Son.

Moreover the Lord has given His disciples the Father’s word. The "word" of the Father is the revelation of the eternal counsels of the Father. Entering into these counsels we drink of the river of His pleasure — a river that widens as it flows bearing us along through millennial ages into the ocean of eternity. Thus, even as the Son, the disciples would not only have the joy of knowing they were under the guardian love of the Father, but they would also know the blessing that love had purposed for them.

Furthermore, if they enjoyed the Son’s portion before the Father they would also share His portion in relation to the world. The world hated Christ because He was not of it. There was nothing in common between Christ and the world. He was but a Stranger here, moved by motives and governed by objects entirely foreign to this world. if He was misunderstood and hated. we also, if following in His path. will be hated by the world.

Thus most blessedly the disciples are set before the Father in the same position that the Son had occupied before the Father as a Man on earth. The Father’s name is revealed to them; the Father’s word is given to them; the Father’s care is assured to them; Christ’s joy is their joy; Christ’s reproach and Christ’s strangership is their portion in this world.

(Vv. 15, 16). Now the Lord resumes His requests The first two requests were connected with things in which the Lord desires His disciples to be kept — holiness and unity. The last two requests are more in connection with things from which He desires they may be preserved. Thus it is the Lord prays that the disciples may be kept from the evil of the world. He does not pray that they may be taken out of it — the time for this had not come — for He had work for them to do in the world. The world, however, being evil, is an ever present danger to His own, hence He prays "Keep them from the evil."

(V. 17). Separation from actual evil is not enough, therefore the Lord also prays for our sanctification. The distinctive truth in sanctification is not simply separation from evil, but rather devotedness and suitability to God. The sanctification for which the Lord prays is not the absolute sanctification which is secured by His death, brought before us in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where we read "By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." In the prayer it is the practical sanctification by which we are divested of all that is unsuitable to God in our thoughts, habits, and practical ways, in order that we may be "sanctified and meet for the Master's use" (2 Timothy 2:21).

We gather from the Lord's words that there are two ways in which this practical sanctification is effected. First by the truth. The Lord speaks of the truth as being "Thy Word," that is the Father's Word. All Scripture, indeed, is the Word of God, but the Father's Word has probably more in view the New Testament, revealing the Father's name, the Father's mind, and the Father's counsel. Every declaration of the name of God calls for a corresponding separation from the world and sanctification to God. To Abraham God declared, "I am the Almighty God." and immediately adds, "Walk before Me, and be thou perfect" (Genesis 17:1). To Israel God revealed Himself as Jehovah, and God looked that Israel's ways should correspond to this name. They were to "fear this glorious and fearful name" (Deuteronomy 28:58). How much more should there be a sanctification that corresponds to the full revelation of God as the Father.

(V. 18). This separation from evil, and sanctification to God is in view of the disciples' service — that they may be morally fit to carry out their mission. This we may gather from the Lord's words that follow, "As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world." Already the Lord has viewed the disciples as in His position before the Father; now He views them as having His place before the world.

(V. 19). Now we learn that there is a second way by which the Lord effects our practical sanctification. Verse 17 has told us of the sanctifying effect of the truth. Here the Lord speaks of sanctifying Himself that we might be sanctified through the truth. The Lord sets Himself apart in the glory to become an Object to attract our hearts outside this present world. We have not only the truth to enlighten our minds, search our consciences, and encourage us in the path but we have, in Christ in the glory, a living Person to powerfully affect our hearts. Attracted by His excellencies, and held by His love, we shall find ourselves increasingly sanctified by the truth that is livingly set forth in Him.

(Vv. 20, 21). At this point in the prayer the Lord very blessedly thinks of all those who will believe on Him through the Apostles' word. He looks down the long ages and brings within the scope of His requests all those who will compose His assembly. In connection with this wider circle the Lord adds a second request for unity, yet differing somewhat from the first request. There the unity was

limited to the Apostles, and it was a request that they might be "one as We." Here, taking in the wider circle, it is a request that they might be "one in Us." This surely is a unity formed by their common interest in the Father and the Son. In social position, intellectual abilities, or material wealth, there may be, and will be, great differences, but the Lord prays that "In Us" — the Father and the Son — they may be one. This oneness was to be a testimony to the world — an evident proof that the Father must have sent the Son to effect such a result. Was there not at Pentecost a partial answer to this prayer when "the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul"? The Saints Glorified with Christ. John 17:22-26 The Lord, in the opening portion of the prayer, has prayed for the glory of the Father. In the second portion He thinks of His own and prays that. during the time of His absence, they may be kept for His glory — that He may be glorified in the saints. In this closing portion of the prayer the Lord passes in thought to the coming glory, and prays that His own may be glorified with Him.

(V. 22). With this great end in view the Lord can say, "The glory which Thou gavest Me, I have given them." The glory that is given to Christ as Man, He secures for, and shares with, His own. This glory He has given to His own that they may be one. So perfect is this unity that nothing less than the unity between the Father and the Son can serve for its pattern, as the Lord can say, "That they may be one, even as We are one."

(V. 23). The words that follow tell us how the saints will be "perfected into one" (N. Tr.), as well as the great end for which they are made one. The Lord indicates how the unity is brought about when He says, "I in them, and Thou in Me." This takes us on to the glory when Christ will be perfectly set forth in the saints, even as the Father is perfectly set forth in the Son. What is it that has marred the unity, and scattered and divided the saints of God on earth? Is it not the allowance in our lives of so much that is not of Christ? Yet, even so, if all the saints on earth, at any given moment, had expressed only Christ, it would hardly have displayed the unity of which the Lord speaks in these closing verses. It will require nothing less than the whole company of the saints in glory to adequately set forth the fulness of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23). Then indeed Christ — and nothing but Christ — will be seen in His people. We shall "all come in the unity of faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect Man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13). The saints so long scattered and divided on earth will be "perfected into one" in glory. "With the voice together shall they sing; for they shall see eye to eye" (Isaiah 52:8). The great end of this perfect unity is the manifestation before the world of the glory of Christ as the sent One of the Father, and the love of the Father for the disciples. When the world sees Christ displayed in glory, in His people, they will know that the One they despised and hated, was indeed the sent One of the Father, and they will realise that the saints of Christ, that they cast out and persecuted, are loved by the Father with the same love that the Father has to Christ.

(V. 24). There is, moreover, a glory far beyond the glory that will be manifested to the world, and, beyond the millennial blessing of the earth, there is an inner circle of heavenly blessing. In this inner place of blessing the saints will have their part, for the Lord can say, "Father I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me, where I am." Very early in the discourses the Lord had revealed the great desire of His heart to receive us unto Himself, that where He is we may be also. Now, once again, as the prayer draws to its close, we are reminded of this desire of His heart, as we hear the Lord saying, "I will that they . . . be with Me where I am."

While, however, it will be our high privilege to be with Him where He is, there will ever be a personal glory, belonging to Christ, which we shall behold, but, which none can share. Christ as the Son will forever have His unique place with the Father. There is a glory that is special to Christ; there is a love that is special to Christ — the love which He enjoyed before the foundation of the world; and there is a knowledge that is special, for the Lord can say, "O Father the world hath not known Thee. but I have known Thee." The saints will know that the One to whom this special glory belongs — this special love, this special knowledge — is the One who has been sent by the Father to make the Father known. Thus they are distinguished from the world that fails to discern that the Son was the sent One of the Father

(V. 26). To His own the Lord declares the Father's name, and the declaration of the Father's name reveals the Father's love, that the consciousness of the Father's love, ever known and enjoyed by the Lord is His pathway, may be known and enjoyed by His disciples. Moreover if this love is in them, Christ — the One that the Father loves — will have a place in their affections He will be in them. Thus as we listen to the last utterance, we are left with the great desire of His heart filling our thoughts, that Christ may be in His people — "I in them."

Very surely this desire of His heart will be fulfilled in the coming glory; but, may we not say, that the great thought of the last discourses, as well as the last prayer, is that Christ should be livingly seen in His people even now? To this end our feet are washed, our hearts are comforted, our lives made fruitful, and our minds instructed. For this end the Lord permits us to listen to His last prayer that closes with the words, "I IN THEM."

S. The Lord Our Resource.

The Lord Our Resource.

Psalms 25:1-22.

Hamilton Smith.

(Extracted from Scripture Truth Vol. 42, 1965-7, pages 269-71) The Twenty-fifth Psalm describes the experiences of a believer who is opposed by enemies that are eager to triumph over him (2); who seek to entrap his feet (15), and hate him with cruel and relentless hatred (19). He feels his desolation and is troubled in heart in the presence of the distresses by which he is surrounded (17). In these circumstances his experiences take a three-fold form. First, he commits himself wholly to God, to be sustained and taught in the ways of God (1-7). Secondly, he comforts his soul by dwelling upon all that God is for those who fear Him (8-14). Thirdly, he spreads out before God his troubles and calls down the eye of God upon himself, his circumstances, and his enemies (15-22),

TRUST IN GOD

(Verses 1-3). The believer overcomes all his difficulties by implicit trust in the LORD. He does not, as one has said, take " the smallest step for the injury of his enemy, but he refers his case to Jehovah, and leaves it in His hands, looking for His deliverance". Committing himself to the LORD he can say, "Let me not be ashamed, let not mine enemies triumph over me". At times, in the presence of opposition and insults, we trust in ourselves, and our efforts, to avenge insults and crush opposers, only to find that we expose ourselves to shame and the triumph of our enemies. But, says the Psalmist, "Let none that wait on thee be ashamed".

(Verses 4, 5). Having found rest in committing himself, and his circumstances, to the LORD, he now desires to see Jehovah’s ways; to be taught His paths, and to be led in the truth. Oftentimes, believers tend to be over-occupied with the evil ways of men, the crooked paths they tread, and the errors they teach. But God has His ways to guide the conduct of His people, His paths for their feet to tread, and His truth wherewith to instruct them. Our great concern should be to see His ways, to be taught His paths, and, not only to know the truth, but to be led in the truth. For such knowledge we shall need to be continually waiting upon God as the Psalmist can say, "On Thee do I wait all the day."

(Verses 6, 7). The thought of God’s ways reminds the believer of his own ways, often so contrary to God’s. This leads to the confession of sins, and to the believer casting himself upon the tender mercies and loving-kindness of the LORD.

DELIGHT IN GOD

(Verse 8) Dwelling upon God’s ways and paths and truth, leads the Psalmist to delight in God. He has confessed his sins, but realising that God is "good and upright", he has confidence that He will

teach even a sinner His way.

(Verse 9). If then the LORD is good and upright there must be a right condition of soul to appreciate God’s ways, to walk in His paths and learn His truth. It is the meek that God will guide, and "the meek will He teach His way". How often we can miss the guidance and teaching of the LORD through our vanity and self-importance, but the acknowledgement of sin, and the realisation of the goodness of God leads to a spirit of meekness which gets the guidance of the LORD, and light as to His way with a right judgment as to good and evil.

(Verse 10). Moreover, every step we take in the paths of the LORD will be marked by mercy, and according to truth, for those who obey the word-that "keep His covenant and His testimonies".

(Verse 11). Realising the mercy and truth of the LORD the soul can be thoroughly open with God. It does not seek to excuse or minimise its sins; on the contrary, it can say, "Pardon mine iniquity for it is great". The flesh would seek to excuse sin and say, "Pardon mine iniquity for it is small". Only the knowledge that there is grace to meet all the sin, will enable us to own the greatness of our sin. It was the exceeding abundance of the grace that met Paul that enabled him to own that he was the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:14-15).

(Verses 12-14). The acknowledgement of sin and the realisation of the goodness of God, not only leads to meekness, but to the fear of God. A God-fearing man is one who walks in the conscious sense of being in the presence of God, and who owns his responsibility to God. Such will not only have moral discernment between right and wrong, but will discern the path that God marks out for His people in the midst of the surrounding darkness and confusion. The secret of the LORD is with them that fear Him. He gives such to know His mind. They will see clearly that God has promised blessing for His people which will surely be fulfilled however difficult the day and however great the confusion and opposition.

Thus we learn that the condition of soul that is needed to see God’s way, to be taught His paths, and to be led in His truth will be found in the one who confesses his sin (8); who is marked by meekness (9); who obeys the word (10), and who walks in the fear of the LORD (12). The flesh is in us and, unless judged and refused, will lead us to justify ourselves rather than confess our sins; will lead to self-importance and self-assertion rather than meekness; will act in self-will rather than obey the word, and has no fear of God.

ALL UNDER THE EYE OF GOD

(Verses 15-18). From the midst of all his trials the believer looks to God and trusts in the One who is above all. He can say, "Mine eyes are ever toward the LORD". Looking up to the LORD he asks the LORD to look down upon his afflictions, the troubles of his heart and his . . . distressing circumstances.

(Verse 19). Further he asks the LORD to consider his enemies and their cruel hatred. He does not ask the LORD to judge them. To call down judgment upon our enemies may also call down the chastening rod upon ourselves. Far better to spread all before the LORD, and leave the LORD to act according to His perfect wisdom. In this spirit the Apostles acted. In New Testament days, when in the presence of their enemies, they did not invoke the judgment of the LORD, but simply brought their trial before the LORD. "Now Lord, behold their threatenings."

(Verses 20-22). Realising that everything in himself, his circumstances, and his enemies is under the eye of the LORD, he can quietly leave everything with the LORD, trusting in Him to keep his soul, while waiting the time when the LORD will redeem His people from all their troubles.

S. The Lord Thy Keeper.

The Lord Thy Keeper.

Psalms 121:1-8.

Hamilton Smith. In this beautiful Psalm we have the experiences of a believer who, in the midst of trials, finds in the LORD his help and unfailing resource. The first verse is really a question. It should read:

"I will lift up mine eyes unto the mountains: from whence shall my help come?" (R.V.) The God-fearing man finds himself faced with trials and difficulties, but realises that in himself he has no power to meet the circumstances. He needs "help." The greatest source of weakness in the presence of trial is often the self-confidence that leads us to think we can meet the trial in our own strength, or by or own wisdom. We have to learn, and it may be like Peter of old, through bitter experience, that, in the presence of trial and temptation, we have no strength in ourselves. At every step we need a helper to support us in the trial, and carry us through the trial.

Realising his need of help, the question immediately arises in the soul of the Psalmist, "From whence shall my help come?" He is surrounded by mountains that look strong, imposing, and immovable, even as there are those in the world that apparently are firmly established in power, and unassailable by an enemy. But can we trust in any fellow creature? The prophet Jeremiah tells us, "Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains: truly in the LORD our God is the salvation of Israel" (Jeremiah 3:23). Realising his need of help, and that the help of man is in vain, the godly man turns from the creature to the Creator, and very blessedly he says, "My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth."

He does not fall back on the acknowledgement of a general truth that there is help in the LORD, but, in simple personal faith, he says, "My help cometh from the LORD." In the remaining verses of the Psalm the Spirit of God answers this simple faith by unfolding to us the blessings of the one who looks to the LORD for his help. The one recurring thought in these verses is the constant care of the LORD. The word "keep" is the characteristic word of the Psalm. Bearing in mind that the word "preserve," in verses 7 and 8, should be translated "keep," it will be noticed that this encouraging word occurs six times in the last six verses.

1. "He will not suffer thy foot to be moved."

First, the soul learns, that, looking to the LORD for help, he will be kept amidst all dangers. In days when we may be faced with sudden dangers, working desolation, how good to be encouraged by the word, "Be not afraid of sudden fear, neither of the desolation of the wicked when it cometh. For the LORD shall be thy confidence, and shall keep thy foot from being moved" (Proverbs 3:25-26). If we take our eyes off the LORD, and get occupied with the passing prosperity of the wicked, we may have to say, like the man of Psalms 73:1-28, "My feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped." Looking to the LORD, and rejoicing in the LORD, we shall be able to say, with

Hannah of old, "He will keep the feet of His saints . . . for by strength shall no man prevail" (1 Samuel 2:1, 1 Samuel 2:9). The road we travel may at times be rough, the enemy may oppose with his wiles and snares; temptations may abound, and difficulties arise — all these trials the LORD may allow — but there is one thing He will not allow: He will not suffer the feet of those that trust in Him to be moved from the path that leads to glory. Thus, in the next Psalm, in response to the LORD'S word "He will not suffer thy foot to be moved," the godly soul can say with the utmost confidence, "Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem" (Psalms 122:2). The last words of the Lord to Peter were, "Follow Me." He has marked out the path for the Christian, and if, with our eye upon Christ as our unfailing help, we follow Him, it will lead far into the depths of glory where He has gone. For the path where our Saviour has gone Has led up to His Father and God, To the place where He's now on the throne, And His strength shall be ours on the road.

2. "He that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep."

Secondly, the one who looks in simple faith to the LORD, learns that His care is unceasing. An apostle may sleep on the mount in the presence of a glory too bright for nature; and again in the garden in the presence of a sorrow too deep for our endurance; but the One who is our Keeper will "neither slumber nor sleep." A back-sliding saint, like Jonah of old, may be "fast asleep," even when the LORD is working, the wind is rising, the sea is raging, the ship is sinking, and the men of the world are trembling, but there is One, who having loved His own which are in the world, loves them unto the end with a love that never ceases to care for His own amid all the storms of life.

Thou weariest not most gracious Lord, Though we may weary grow; In season, the sustaining word Thou giv'st our hearts to know.

3. "The LORD is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand."

Thirdly, looking to the LORD for his help, the soul is assured that the help of the LORD is always available. A friend at our right hand is a friend at our side, to whom we can turn at any moment. So David can say, "I have set the LORD alway before me: because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved." The wicked man, trusting in himself, "said in his heart I shall not be moved," only to come under the judgment of the LORD (Psalms 10:6, Psalms 10:16). The godly man, trusting in the LORD at his right hand, can say, "I shall not be moved." Moreover, he can say it with the utmost confidence, for if the Lord says, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee, . . . we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Hebrews 13:5-6). How good to realise there is a Friend beside me, to whom I can turn — One with all wisdom to guide in every difficulty, with all the power to overcome every opposition, with all sympathy in every sorrow, and all grace for every weakness, and mercy for every need. The storm may roar without me, My heart may low be laid, But God is round about me, And can I be dismayed?

4. "The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night."

Fourthly, the believer looking to the LORD for his help, is assured that he will be kept at al/ seasons. In a world of warring nations we have to face ever present dangers, both "by day" and "by night." The LORD does not say to the believer, "Thou shalt not have to face these terrors even as others," but He says, "If you make Me your 'refuge', and put your 'trust' in Me, 'Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day. Nor for the pestilence that

walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday'" (Psalms 91:2, Psalms 91:5-6).

5. "The LORD shall keep thee from all evil: He shall keep thy soul."

Fifthly, the believer that looks to the LORD for his help will be kept from all evil. At a time when the world, as in the days of Noah, is increasingly marked by corruption and violence, evil will take many forms. Scripture speaks of evil thoughts, evil imaginations, evil words, evil deeds, and evil doers. The Christian, being blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places, will, in a special way, be opposed by the "spiritual wickedness in high places" that is working behind the scenes. Nevertheless, looking to the LORD, the believer will, "in the power of His might," be able to withstand every attack of the enemy in "the evil day," and thus be kept from evil (Ephesians 6:10-13).

Moreover, in a world in which we know not what a day may bring forth how good to know that, of the one who looks to the LORD for his help, it can be said, "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed trusting in the LORD" (Psalms 112:7). The Apostle Paul warns us that we live in a day when "evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived" (2 Timothy 3:13). In his day he had to meet those who did him "much evil" but, trusting in the Lord, he could say, "The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom" (2 Timothy 4:14, 2 Timothy 4:18).

Nought can stay our steady progress, More than conquerors we shall be If our eyes, whate’er the danger, Look to Thee, and none but Thee.

6. "The LORD shall keep thy going out and thy coming in."

Sixthly, the soul that looks to the LORD for his help can count upon the unfailing care of the LORD in all circumstances. "Going" and "coming" speak of the changing circumstances that mark a world of unrest. In the gospel day, the Lord could say to His disciples, "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile: for there were many coming and going, and they had not leisure so much as to eat" (Mark 6:31). In His compassionate care the Lord will give us times of rest "apart" from the busy world; but, down here, it will only be "rest awhile" — words that indicate we must be again in movement. For the eternal rest we must look on. "There remaineth . . . a rest to the people of God." Of the one that entereth into that blessed rest we read, "He shall go no more out" (Hebrews 4:9; Revelation 3:12). In the meantime, in all the busy round of a life of toil in a world of need, the one that looks to the Lord for his help can count on the Lord to keep him in every circumstance.

Wherever He may guide me, No want shall turn me back My Shepherd is beside me, And nothing can I lack, His wisdom ever waketh His sight is never dim;

He knows the way He taketh, And I will walk with Him.

7. "From this time forth and for evermore."

Finally, we learn that the one who looks to the Lord for his help may be assured that he will be kept through all time even for evermore. The Psalmist, doubtless, had the Millennial reign in view; the Christian can give a wider application to the words as he looks on to a glad eternity to be spent

"evermore" with Christ and like Christ in the Father’s house, where He has gone to prepare a place for His heavenly people. The Lord can say of His sheep, "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any one pluck them out of My hand." In the beautiful picture of Luke 15:1-32, the Lord finds His lost sheep, "layeth it on His shoulders," and "cometh home." Nothing less than His home will do for His sheep. We may wander, but He finds His sheep, He keeps them in His strength in their passage through time, and at last He will bring all His wandering sheep home to be, "FOR EVER WITH THE LORD."

We thus learn from this beautiful Psalm that, trusting in the LORD, and looking to Him for our help, we shall find, He will keep us from all danger; His care will be unceasing; His help is always available;

He will keep us at all seasons;

He will keep us from all evil;

He will keep us in all circumstances;

He will keep us through all time for evermore.

Oh keep my soul, then, Jesus Abiding still with Thee, And if I wander, teach me Soon back to Thee to flee.

S. The Loveliness of Christ.

The Loveliness of Christ.

Psalms 16:1-11.

Hamilton Smith.

We need every Scripture for conviction, correction, and instruction; but the Scriptures that present "the things concerning Himself" must have a special charm for the Christian. It is this that makes Psalms 16:1-11 so attractive, for it sets forth the moral perfections of Christ, the perfect Man, as He trod the path of life through this world of sin and death. How good, then, to look away from self, and the very best of our fellow-men, to contemplate this perfect Man in all His excellence — to sit down, as it were, under His shadow with great delight and find His fruit sweet to our taste.

It is reported of one, who listened to the ministry of the saintly Rutherford, that he said, "He showed me the loveliness of Christ." In his Psalm we may surely say that David, led by the Spirit, unrolls before us the loveliness of Christ.

We know that Christ is a Divine Person — the Eternal Son and, as such, was the perfect manifestation of God to man. But we also know that He was a true Man — the Son of Man — and as such, was the perfect expression of man before God. It is in this latter aspect that Christ is presented in this beautiful Psalm.

We can learn what God is only in Christ; and we can learn what man is in perfection only as set forth in Christ. In Him we see the beautiful qualities, the gracious experiences, the joy and the gladness, that mark the life of the perfect man before God, together with the fulness of joy to which this life leads. Thus Christ becomes the only standard of excellence — the perfect model for the believer. Moreover, in being occupied with Christ there is a transforming power. Feeding upon Christ as the Bread of God which "cometh down from heaven" — to trace His path through this world in all its loveliness, will, in a special way, draw out our affections to Himself. When here, the Father opened the heavens to express His delight in Christ; and He gives us to delight in the same Object in which He delights. Delighting our souls in Him we shall be changed into His likeness.

Here, then, we have portrayed in all its blessedness the inner life of a perfect Man lived before God by One who trod this path of life in perfection, and who has reached the end of the path — the right hand of God.

"Preserve me, O God: for in Thee do I put my trust" (v. 1). This perfect life is a life of dependence and confidence. Dependence upon the power of God and confidence in the love of God. The Lord Jesus did not trust Himself or look to others — either men or angels — to be preserved from all the opposition and dangers He had to meet. Nor did He depend upon Himself, with entire dependence to God, saying, "Preserve me, O God", and He did so with entire confidence, for He said, "In Thee do I put my trust." He was entirely dependent upon God’s hand of power, because He had entire confidence in God’s heart of love. With unbounded confidence in boundless love He looked to God

to preserve Him.

He was neither ignorant of, nor indifferent to, His enemies. He could say, "They that hate Me without a cause are more than the hairs of Mine head: they that would destroy Me, being Mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty" (Psalms 69:4). He knew their number; He knew their strength; He knew their treachery; but He knew that God was above all His enemies, and that no one was above God, and in perfect confidence He looks alone to God. As He can say in the language of another Psalm, "As for Me, I will call upon God; and the LORD shall save Me. Evening and morning, and at noon, will I pray and cry aloud; and He shall hear My voice" (Psalms 55:16-17). And yet, in the perfection of His way, He was at times brought very low in His circumstances, and thus tested in a way, and to an extent, that we shall never know. At times He had nowhere to lay His head, and on occasions lacks even a cup of cold water. But such testings only brought out the perfection of His Manhood, for still He can say, "Preserve Me, O God: for in Thee do I put My trust." And God answered His prayer, and used a fallen woman to quench His thirst, and some unknown person to provide a pillow for His head.

Following in the footsteps of the Lord, the Apostle Paul could say in his prison, "The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom" (2 Timothy 4:18). Have we such confidence in the love of the Father, and of Christ, that, in the presence of enemies, dangers and desertion, we can say, "Preserve me, O God, for in Thee do I put my trust"?

"O my soul thou hast said unto the LORD, Thou art my Lord: my goodness extendeth not to Thee" (v. 2). The perfect life is a life of wholehearted subjection to the will of God. As the perfectly subject Man He could say to Jehovah, "Thou art My Lord." Coming into the world He said, "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God" (Hebrews 10:9). Passing through this world He could say, "I do always those things that please Him" (John 8:29). Going out of this world He said, "Father . . . not My will, but Thine be done" (Luke 22:42).

Doing only the Father’s will, all that He did was perfectly good. He "went about doing good." There was also Divine goodness toward man, perfectly expressed in the Son of God. But the goodness of which this Psalm speaks is the goodness of Christ as man towards men, and though perfect in its place, does not rise to the height of Divine goodness. So the Lord can say of this goodness, "My goodness extendeth not to Thee."

Only as we are subject to the Father’s will shall we do good as we pass along our way. When converted, the first question asked by the Apostle Paul was, "What shall I do, Lord?" (Acts 22:10). Hitherto he had done his own will; now he submits to the will of the Lord. The proud, overbearing Pharisee becomes the lowly man in subjection to the Lord.

"To the saints that are in the earth and to the excellent, thou hast said, in them is all my delight" (v. 3). This perfect life is a lowly life that finds its delight with God’s poor people. The perfection of Jesus in all His lowly grace is seen in the place He takes in association with the poor of the earth. "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him?" (James 2:5). Are believers lowly and of little account in this world? Then let them remember that the Lord delights to associate with such, for we read, "Though the LORD be high, yet hath He respect unto the lowly, but the proud He knoweth afar off" (Psalms 138:6). To indulge the pride of the flesh and boast in birth, and worldly position, is to

separate ourselves from the excellent of the earth and put ourselves "afar off" from God. The word to each one is, "Go along with the lowly" (Romans 12:16).

However feeble, however failing, however poor, they are the excellent of the earth, and in them God finds His delight. Are we lowly enough in our eyes, and have we so learnt our own nothingness that we can associate with God’s poor people and find our delight where He finds His?

"Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another: their drink offerings of blood will I not offer, nor take up their names into my lips" (v. 4). The life of the perfect Man is a life of separation from evil. The Lord refused every object that would come in between the soul and God. The devil bid high in the endeavour to turn the Lord from the separate path. He offered Him "all the kingdoms of the world" if He would but worship the devil. The Lord’s reply was, "It is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve" (Luke 4:5-8). A very little bit of this world is too often sufficient to ensnare our souls, and thus we turn aside to seek some passing satisfaction in the things of this world, only to find that we multiply to ourselves sorrows. The Lord refused the idols of this world. He would not take up their names into His lips. The word to us is, "Little children keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21).

"The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage" (vv. 5, 6). The LORD is the portion of this life and of the inheritance that lies outside this world. Not only was the Lord entirely separate from the world, but the LORD was His portion in another world. Moreover, as He passed along His way to the eternal inheritance the LORD filled His cup in His daily path. The cup is the actual present enjoyment of the future heavenly portion. With the LORD as His heavenly portion, as well as the source of His present joy, He can say, "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places: yea, I have a goodly heritage." As to circumstances, He was indeed the man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. It is not, however, the circumstances of which the Psalm speaks, but of the inner life lived in the circumstances. The life was lived in the sweet enjoyment of the love and support of the Father, and such experiences turned the roughest paths into "pleasant places." In the dullness of our way we little realise what the joy of a life must be that is lived in relationship with the Father and the constant enjoyment of all that the Father is. We shall know the fulness of the joy of this life in a day to come; but the Lord Jesus knew it without a cloud as He trod the path of life through this world.

"I will bless the LORD who hath given me counsel: my reins also instruct me in the night season" (v. 7). This perfect life is a life in which the LORD is the Counsellor and Guide. It is written that, "It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23). And again we read, "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." It is not merely that we refer to the Lord in some great emergency, but that we habitually wait upon the Lord in the details of life, great and small. Acknowledging Him, we shall find that He guides us: then shall we be able to say, "I will bless the LORD, who hath given me counsel."

"I have set the LORD always before me: because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved" (v. 8). The perfect life has only one object — the Lord Himself. Christ walked on earth with singleness of eye. He set Jehovah before Him as His only object. In such a life there is nothing of self, and no room for self-will.

Setting the LORD before Him, he found the LORD was ever at hand to support Him. Moreover, being at His right hand to support, nothing moved Him from the path of life.

Such is the path open to the believer. Alas! we have to own how little we know of its blessedness; and yet, if day by day, we set the Lord before us as our one object: to serve Him, to please Him, to do His will, shall we not find that He will be at our right hand to support us? And being supported, we shall not be moved, or turned aside, by any trying circumstances, opposition, slights or sufferings we may be called to meet.

"Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption" (vv. 9, 10). This perfect life has its joy and gladness, though not like the joy of this world that depends upon outward circumstances. The Lord says, "My heart is glad," not necessarily, My circumstances are bright. The joy is in the heart; even as David can say, "Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased" (Psalms 4:4). The world's joy is in prosperous circumstances, the corn and the wine. The Lord could say to His disciples, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you" (John 15:11). The Lord's joy remains even in view of death; for His confidence is still in God, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in Sheol; neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption." Christ is indeed the "Holy One," but believers are "holy and beloved," and, as such, can know the blessedness of the life of Christ as man. They, too, can look on with confidence, knowing that God will not leave the soul in death nor the body in corruption.

"Thou wilt show me the path of life; in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (v. 11). This life is a life lived in the light of the glory to which it leads. Every path has a destined end. "The path of life" leads into the presence of the LORD where there is fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore. In all the opposition the Lord Jesus had to meet — the contradiction of sinners, the insults and reproach from the religious world, the ignorance and forsaking of His own — He endured in the light of the glory before Him. As we read, 'Who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." The word to us is, "Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds."

Alas! we often break down in the presence of contradiction and insult; we grow weary and faint under the pressure of a long, drawn-out trial, because we lose sight of the glory at the end of the road — the joy that is set before us. Instead of quietly enduring insults and shame, too often we return evil for evil, and railing for railing. We may attempt to justify our strong words and our hasty acts, but the one test is, would Jesus have acted as we did? Would Jesus have said what we said?

If then we would think and speak and act as the Lord Jesus did, when treading the path of life — if in any measure we would experience the blessedness of the lovely life marked out by Christ — let us tread the path, "Looking unto Jesus" in the glory — the end of the path, let us "Consider" Jesus as He trod the path of life. Then it may be the transforming power of the loveliness of Christ will, even now, change us into His image "from glory to glory."

Moreover, let us remember that the grace that enabled the Lord to tread the path of life is available for us; for, from His place in the glory, He still serves us as our Great High Priest, to succour, sympathize and sustain us as we seek to follow in His steps in the path of life that He has marked out for us. Whatever we may have to meet, whatever we may be called upon to endure — opposition, insults or desertions — let us remember the word, "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 2:1).

Such is the loveliness of Christ as He trod the path of life, lived in all its beauty before God, and marked out for His people to follow. A life of dependence upon the Father's hand of power, confidence in the Father's heart of love, and subjection to the Father's will. A life of lowliness that finds its delight with God's poor people — the excellent of the earth. A life of separation from evil, finding in the Lord its future portion and its present cup of blessing. A life guided by the counsel of the Lord, and which has the Lord as its one Object, and has the Lord ever-present to support. A life of secret joy and gladness that ends at last in the presence of the Lord, where there is fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore. The Lord is Himself gone before;

He has marked out the path that we tread, It's as sure as the love we adore, We have nothing to fear nor to dread. For the path where our Saviour is gone Has led up to His Father and God, To the place where He's now on the throne, And His strength shall be ours on the road. And with Him shall our rest be on high, When in holiness bright we sit down, In the joy of His love ever nigh, In the peace that His presence shall crown.

S. The Man in the Glory.

The Man in the Glory.

Acts 7:54-60. The striking scene described in the closing verses of the Seventh chapter of the Acts, brings before us in a vivid way the great truth that, at the present moment, Christ is in the glory as the Son of Man. This does not imply that He ever ceases to be God; but having become Man He ascends to glory as the Son of Man.

Two great facts are presented in the first seven chapters of the Acts; First, the ascension of Christ; secondly, the descent of the Holy Spirit. These two events distinguish the present period from all other dispensations, past or future. All the great events brought before us in the Acts — the establishment of Christianity, the formation of the Church, the proclamation of the Gospel, and the preservation of believers, depend upon these two facts. Yet, strangely enough, in Christendom these two mighty events are very largely overlooked, and their import almost entirely forgotten.

All evangelical Christians rightly make much of the Cross as the righteous foundation of all our blessing. Rightly, also, believers press the Second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ by which the redeemed will be brought into the fulness of blessing. But the two intervening facts — that there is a Man in the glory, and a Divine Person on earth — are but little appreciated.

Nevertheless, the importance of these two facts cannot be overstated. For, while the Cross closes our past, and the coming of Christ opens to us the future, these two great facts secure our present blessing. This becomes plain when we remember that the Church is formed of believers united to Christ, the Head in heaven, by the Holy Spirit present on earth. To lose sight of these two facts will mean the loss of the great truth of the Mystery of the Church. This alas, has happened, with the result that confusion has come into Christendom, and believers have formed themselves into companies under some humanly appointed head. The result has been that the One Body formed by the Holy Spirit has been practically ignored, the Church outwardly has been ruined, and the children of God scattered and divided. In the first two chapters of the Acts these two great events are brought before us. The first chapter opens with presenting the risen Lord in the midst of His disciples. In His last words He tells them that the Holy Spirit was coming and that they would receive power after that He had come. Then we read, "When He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up: and a cloud received Him out of their sight." The Angels immediately speak of Him as "Jesus, which is taken up into heaven." Then, in the beginning of the second chapter we have the record of the second great event — the coming of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 1:1-26, Jesus goes up to heaven as a Man; in Acts 2:1-47, the Holy Spirit comes down to earth as a Divine Person.

Passing on to Acts 7:1-60, we see the practical effect of these two great truths upon a believer on earth. In this striking chapter we have Stephen’s address before the Jewish Council. He commences his testimony with the statement that "The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham." His witness ends with the statement, "Behold I see the heavens opened, and the Son

of Man standing on the right hand of God."

It was wonderful that the God of glory should appear to a man on earth; it was still more wonderful that a Man should appear in the glory of God in heaven. And yet these two facts are closely connected. The first gives us the call of God, the second the purpose of God for which we are called.

What does Stephen mean when he speaks of "the God of glory?" What does he mean by "glory?" In Scripture "glory" is always that which displays the distinguishing character of a person. Looking at this world we see on every hand the glory of man, or that which displays man. But there is another world, a better and a brighter world where everything speaks of the glory of God — where God is displayed; a world that is filled with love, and life, and holiness — a world into which nothing that defiles can enter, and where no shadow of death will ever come. Now the God of that scene — the God of glory, appeared to Abraham and called him out of this present world of sin and sorrow and death. The purpose for which God called him is clearly seen at the end of the chapter, when Stephen looks up through the opened heavens and sees a Man in the glory of God. If God calls a man out of this world, it is with the blessed purpose of having that man in glory with Christ and like Christ. This call and purpose is true, not only for Abraham and Stephen, but, for every believer at the present time — the youngest as well as the oldest. In Romans 8:28, these two truths, "calling" and "purpose," are found together, for we are said to be "called according to His purpose." In 2 Timothy 1:9, we again have these two truths brought together, for we there read that God "hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace." Then in 2 Thessalonians 2:14, believers are definitely told by the apostle Paul that they are "called by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." Into this scene of glory we are permitted to look, for we read of Stephen that he "looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God." He saw a scene filled with all that speaks of God — love and life and light. But he saw more: in the midst of that scene he saw a Man — JESUS — and he exclaims, "Behold I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God."

What Stephen saw we can still see by faith: for the Man that has gone back to glory — to Whom the everlasting doors were flung wide to let the King of Glory in — has left the heavens open behind Him, so that Christians on earth can by faith look up and say, in the words of the apostle, "We see Jesus crowned with glory and honour."

Oh the sight in heaven is glorious!

Man in righteousness is there;

Once the Victim, now victorious Jesus lives in glory fair.

Now mark the practical effect of these two great truths — that there is a Man in the glory and a Divine Person indwelling the believer on earth — as set forth in the story of Stephen. Let us remember the circumstances in which Stephen finds himself. He has been taken prisoner and taken before the Council; false witnesses have been set up against him, and he has been wickedly charged with blasphemy. He has borne a faithful witness, with the result that his opposers are cut to the heart and gnash upon him with their teeth. In the presence of this sore trial how does he act? His enemies gnash upon him; does he gnash upon them? They revile him; does he revile

again? He suffers; but does he threaten? He does none of these things that are so natural for the flesh to do. What then does he do? In the presence of false charges, malice, and violence, instead of turning upon his enemies, he at once turns to the Lord in glory. Let us then note the four things that take place in this fine scene that depicts the believer on earth in the presence of trial.

First, "Being full of the Holy Spirit," Stephen "looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God and Jesus." The Holy Spirit has not come to exalt the believer before others, or to prosper the believer in this world, or to settle believers in comfort, and ease, free from every trial. He has come to exalt Christ, to turn our thoughts from earth to heaven, and from men in their wickedness to Christ and His glory, to occupy our thoughts and affections with Christ. The result then of being filled with the Holy Spirit will be to lead a man on earth to look up to the Man in heaven. Thus Christ in the glory becomes the object of the believer's affections and the unfailing resource in every trial.

Secondly, the result of a man on earth looking up to the Man in the glory is that the man on earth is supported by the Man in the glory. In the midst of the most terrible circumstances (Stephen) is not, in this case, delivered from the trial, he is supported in it. Surrounded by an infuriated mob, with the stones falling fast upon him, he is so sustained that no word of anger, or reproach, escapes his lips; and in the very presence of death his spirit is kept in perfect calm.

Thirdly, being supported by the Man in the glory, the man on earth becomes a true representative of the Man in the glory. Thus Stephen having looked to Christ, is supported by Christ, and becomes like Christ. He prays for his enemies, even as the Lord, when enduring yet greater sufferings, could pray for His enemies saying, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." Again in view of death, Stephen calmly commends his spirit to the Lord, recalling the Lord's own words, "Father into Thy hands I commend my spirit."

Fourthly, having witnessed a good confession and finished his course, Stephen fell asleep and departs to be with Christ in glory.

Let us remember that the experiences Stephen passed' through are not apostolic. They are possible for every believer during the Christian period. We may not, like Stephen, be called to pass home by a martyr's death; nevertheless, in different forms, and in varying measures we all have to face trial and opposition. It may be that we are called to meet envy, malice, insults, and provocation, and that even from the children of God; but, whatever the form of the trial, the question comes home to each one, "How do I act in the presence of the trial?" We can, alas, act in the flesh, and too often do so, with the result that we render evil for evil, and railing for railing, to our shame and loss. But there is another way, and a better way; we can act in the Spirit after the pattern of Stephen. So doing, whatever the trial, We shall at once look to Christ in glory, to find, We are supported by Christ in the glory, and thus, We become representatives of Christ in the glory, until We are taken to be with Christ in the glory.

Thus in this fine scene we have set forth all the outstanding characteristics of the present dispensation:

1. Christ is seen as the Man in the glory supporting His tried saints on earth, and receiving them to heaven as they fall asleep.

2. The Holy Spirit is seen as a Divine Person on earth filling believers and leading them to look up stedfastly to Christ in heaven.

3. The believer is seen filled with the Spirit drawing all his resources from the Man in the glory, and, while so doing, becoming changed into the likeness of Christ, from glory to glory, so that the Man in the glory is represented in the man on earth.

4. The world, stripped of all its glory, is seen in its true character as rejecting Christ, resisting the Spirit and persecuting the believer.

5. Heaven is seen as flung open to disclose to us Christ in the glory, and to receive the spirits of the saints as they fall asleep.

H. Smith.

S. The Man of God in a Day of Ruin.

The Man of God in a Day of Ruin.

(2 Timothy 2:1-13.) The importance of the Second Epistle of Paul to Timothy lies in the fact that it was written in a day when the ruin of the Church in responsibility had already commenced. This early failure has led to the difficult times of these last days marked by the corruption of the Christian profession. The Epistle instructs us in the mind of the Lord for believers in the midst of the ruin and corruption.

Moreover it is clearly indicated in the Epistle that the root of all the failure was, not that believers ceased to preach the gospel concerning Christ as the Saviour of sinners, but rather that they did not retain the great truth especially revealed to the Apostle Paul — the truth of the Mystery concerning Christ and the Church. In the third chapter the Apostle speaks of his doctrine, and his manner of life. His doctrine, in a special way set forth the truth of the Mystery; and his manner of life, the practical life consistent with this truth. Thus the saints retention, or loss, of this great truth is largely determined by their attitude towards the Apostle Paul and his doctrine. In this connection we may notice what a striking place the little word "me" has in this Epistle. First, the man whose doctrine and manner of life set forth this great truth, has the support of the Lord, Himself. Thus Paul can say, "The Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, that by me the proclamation might be fully made." Further, he says, "The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom" (2 Timothy 4:17-18). Secondly, there were those who accepted the Apostle’s doctrine and the reproach involved, and stood by the Apostle in his sufferings. Thus, of Timothy, when speaking of the truth, he can say, "Thou hast heard of me," and again he says, "The things that thou hast heard of me" (2 Timothy 1:13 :2 Timothy 2:2). Further, in Onesiphorus he delights to find one of whom he can say, "He oft refreshed me," and one who was prepared to accept the reproach of Christ, for the Apostle adds, he "was not ashamed of my chain," and "He sought me out very diligently, and found me," and in "many things he ministered unto me" (2 Timothy 1:16-18). In the last chapter the Apostle can say, "Luke is with me," and Mark "is profitable to me for the ministry" (2 Timothy 4:11). Thirdly, there was another class that showed their indifference to Paul’s doctrine by their neglect of the Apostle and even opposition to him. Thus he has to say, "All they which are in Asia be turned away from me" (2 Timothy 1:15). "Demas hath forsaken me." "Alexander . . . did me much evil." Lastly, there came a moment when the test was so severe that he has to say, "No man stood with me, but all men forsook me" (2 Timothy 4:16).

Thus, in those early days, when the truth of the Mystery was known we find that the man that ministered this great truth, and accepted the reproach it entailed, had the support of the Lord, and was strengthened by the Lord. Moreover, we find that there were those who accepted the truth with its reproach and were not ashamed to identify themselves with one who stood for the truth. Lastly, we find that even in those early days there were those who were not prepared to maintain the truth with its reproach. Some, like those in Asia, turned away from the Apostle; some went

further and, like Demas, forsook the Apostle; others went further still in their opposition and, like Alexander, insulted the Apostle. So in these last days, amongst those to whom the truth of the Church has been revived do we not see the same principles at work? Does not the one who, in any little measure, stands for the truth and walks in the path of separation it entails, have the support of the Lord; whereas the one who knows the truth and yet ceases to maintain it loses his power in ministry and often-times drifts back into the systems of men? Moreover, the one who seeks to stand for the truth will have the fellowship and support of others who value the truth and are prepared to face the reproach it entails, though he must be prepared to find many who will turn away from him, some who will forsake him, and a few who will oppose him with malice and insult, and greatly withstand his words.

It is important to remember that the instruction of the Apostle is addressed to a brother who, on the one hand, knew and appreciated the truth ministered by Paul, and, on the other hand, felt the solemn departure from the truth. Writing to the Colossian saints, the Apostle desires that they may be brought to "the full knowledge of the mystery" (Colossians 2:2, N. Tn.); in contrast to these saints he can say of Timothy, "Thou hast fully known my doctrine" (3:10). Moreover, the Apostle could say to Timothy that he was mindful of his tears. The Lord, Himself, was a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He wept over hardhearted sinners, and wept with broken-hearted saints. Paul, following in His steps was a man of tears. He watered his service with tears, for he speaks of "serving the Lord with all lowliness and with many tears" (Acts 20:19). Moreover, he wept over the saints as he foresaw the failure and sorrows that would overtake the Church after his decease; thus he can say to the Ephesian assembly, that had now turned from him, "by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears" (Acts 20:31). In Timothy he finds a like-minded man, one for whom he could thank God, and remember in his prayers night and day, "being mindful" of his "tears" (2 Timothy 1:3-4).

We may well challenge our hearts with the questions, Could it be said of us that we fully know Paul’s doctrine? Are we heart-broken as we see the little appreciation of the great truths concerning Christ and the Church that exists even among those to whom these truths have been recovered? May we not well weep as we see, with the giving up of these truths, the increase of self-will, independency and lawlessness, with the consequent disintegration, amongst the people of God?

If, then, in any measure we appreciate the truth of the Mystery; if we feel the solemn departure from the truth, we shall surely welcome the instruction and encouragement of the Epistle. Before giving us the definite instruction for the individual as to the path of separation in a day of ruin, the Apostle, in 1 John 2:1-13, very blessedly brings before us the characteristics and aims of the one who values the truth and desires to stand for it in a day of ruin. It is obvious that the one who is prepared to take God’s path in a day of ruin must have certain moral qualifications and definite aims. Lacking these things he would hardly be prepared for a path that entails suffering and reproach, or if under a passing influence the path is taken, under the strain of any little pressure it would be given up. The first great necessity in a day of weakness and ruin is to be "strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (verse 1). Does this not imply that though, like Timothy, we may be naturally timid, yet there is grace in Christ to enable us to stand against the rising tide of evil, and to take the path the Lord has marked out in the midst of the corruptions of Christendom, and to continue in that path in spite of failure, opposition, desertion and reproach. However great and

many the difficulties we may have to face there is grace in Christ Jesus, and however weak in ourselves we can draw upon that grace. Paul, himself, was a striking example of what he presses upon believers. He was faced with infirmities, reproaches, necessities, persecutions and distresses for Christ's sake; but the Lord said to him, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Immediately he speaks of this grace as "the power of Christ," for he adds, "most gladly there-fore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). The grace of Christ is then all the power of Christ available for a weak and needy saint. If the grace of Christ was sufficient for the Apostle in all his persecutions and trials, it is surely sufficient for us in our little measure of trial.

Secondly, having the grace of Christ for his support, the believer is to seek to maintain the truth and pass it on to others (verse 2). In a day of ruin there is the ever-present danger of surrendering the truth because of the opposition it raises, the reproach it entails, and the difficulties in walking in consistency with it. Timothy, who had already been exhorted to keep by the Holy Spirit the truth which he had heard of the Apostle, is now exhorted to commit it to faithful men, who in their turn, will be able to teach others. And in our day, if the truth has been recovered to us, are we not still responsible to hand it on to others, in spite of all our failure in carrying it out. To use the words addressed to the prophet Ezekiel, "Whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear" we are responsible to pass on that which has been given to us. We may well challenge our hearts as to how far we have answered to this exhortation

Thirdly, the man of God, in a day of ruin, is called to be "a good soldier of Jesus Christ." The great truth of the mystery has from the outset of Christianity called forth the increasing opposition of the powers of darkness. How well the enemy knew that if he could rob the saints of this truth, they would settle down in this world and all the corruptions of Christendom would follow. Moreover, in these days when there has been a recovery of the truth, it is still the great effort of the enemy once again to rob the saints of the mystery and thus draw them back into religious systems that practically ignore Christ as the Head of His Church and deny the truth of the one Body. To meet this opposition involves conflict, and we are each exhorted to enter this conflict as "a good soldier of Jesus Christ." The good soldier will have three marks. First he will be prepared to face suffering. So the exhortation is "Take thy share in suffering" (N. Tn.). It may be a very small share compared with the sufferings of the Apostle; but we must be prepared in some measure to face opposition (1 John 2:25); persecution (1 John 3:12); desertion (1 John 4:10); and malice (1 John 4:14).

Secondly, the good soldier must beware against entangling himself with the affairs of this life. He may have to attend to many duties, but he does not allow himself to be absorbed by them. Thirdly, above all, the good soldier is one who seeks, not to please himself, or even others, but first and foremost to please the One Who has called him to be a soldier. In loyal allegiance to the One Who has chosen him he seeks only His pleasure, and refuses every human organisation that involves direction from mere human authority.

Fourthly, the man of God is to be marked by faithfulness in service. Using the public games as a figure, the Apostle says "If also any one contend in the games he is not crowned unless he contend lawfully" (N. Tn.). The crown will not be given for great activity, nor for the amount of service, but for faithfulness in service. We are thus warned against adopting carnal means, and worldly expedients in the service of the Lord. Our service must be in accord with divine principles,

and hence the independency that ignores the fellowship into which we are called, and the one Body of which we form part, is ruled out.

Fifthly, the man of God is to be marked by patient labour. The husbandman must first work before partaking of the fruits. We are often discouraged unless we see immediate results. It is well to persevere in our work knowing that God is not unrighteous to forget our "work and labour of love." The faithful servant is content to labour on and wait to hear the "Well done" of the One he seeks to please.

Sixthly, in the midst of a busy round of toil the man of God is not to forget to take time for meditation. Already, in the first Epistle, the Apostle had exhorted Timothy to "give attendance to reading" and to "meditate upon these things." Now he says "Think of what I say." It is not enough to have exhortations and in a general way admit their truth. If they are to govern our lives, we must ponder these things: and as we do so the Lord will give us understanding. The Apostle could set certain truths before Timothy, even as we can minister to one another but the Lord alone can give understanding. He can both open the Scriptures to His disciples and also open "their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:27; Luke 24:32; Luke 24:45).

Seventhly, the last great exhortation directs our thoughts to Christ. Himself. If, in a day of ruin, we are to answer to the mind of God, it will be needful, above all else, to "remember Jesus Christ." Are we called to suffer as good soldiers of Jesus Christ then let us remember that Jesus Christ as the perfect Man — the seed of David — has been before us in the path of suffering and has suffered death and has been raised from among the dead, and has thus secured salvation with eternal glory for His people. This was the gospel that Paul preached: not only "salvation," but "salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." Moreover, the faithful proclamation of this gospel involved suffering for the Apostle. In the atoning sufferings the Lord was alone, but in His sufferings from the hands of men we, in our little measure, can share. Paul could say, "I suffer trouble as an evil doer," and he adds "I endure all things." For the sake of God’s elect — that they might have the truth — he was prepared to endure persecution, forsaking, desertion, and insults.

Further, he was encouraged to face the suffering by the faithful saying that tells us, "If we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him. If we suffer we shall also reign with Him." There is, however, the solemn warning that, in the great profession there may be those whose life is a denial of the Lord that they profess. Such will be denied of the Lord.

If then we are to "endure all things" it can only be as we "remember Jesus Christ." Thus the passage that commences with directing our hearts to the grace of Christ, closes by bringing before us Christ, Himself. If we are to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, if we are to hold the truth and pass it on to others, if we are to be good soldiers of Jesus Christ, if we are to be preserved from being entangled with the affairs of this life, if we are to strive lawfully, if we are to patiently labour, and if we are to meditate on these things, we must, above all have the Lord before us — the One that has died and has been raised from among the dead.

H. Smith. Be Thou the object bright and fair To fill and satisfy the heart: Our hope to meet Thee in the air, And nevermore from Thee to part; That we may undistracted be To follow, serve, and wait for Thee.

What Affliction Produces.

David was a man after God’s own heart; but he had to endure years of affliction, even after being anointed king. Never, however, let us forget that but for these circumstances we should have been without most of his Psalms, and that his sufferings from within and without, his exercises of soul, and the persecutions of his enemies, were the occasions which called them forth. So it was in Paul’s case. But for his Roman prison, we might not have had many of his valuable epistles.

S. The New Command.

The New Command.

Hamilton Smith.

"A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." — John 13:34. His hour has come; at last the Father’s home, Beyond dark death, as sunlight on the hill, Shines o’er the valley of the Father’s will. The day has dawned, when He must leave His own To tread a path that He must take alone; And drawing nearer to that day of days, Upon His soul a load of sorrow weighs:

Upon His heart of love divine, well known, One rests his wearied head, with great delight;

One takes the sop, and passes into night: And thus set free, the Master’s voice is heard —

"If all men are to learn that ye are Mine, Then take to heart My last — My parting word — And let your love to one another shine."

S. The Old Prophet of Bethel.

The Old Prophet of Bethel.

1 Kings 13:1-32; 2 Kings 23:17-18.

Hamilton Smith. The events recorded in the Thirteenth chapter of the First Book of Kings transpired in a day when the nation of Israel was falling into apostacy. For this reason they have special significance, and warning, for believers whose lot, as in the present day, is cast in the midst of a corrupt Christendom fast moving on to the great apostacy. The story unfolded is mainly concerned with three persons — King Jeroboam, "a man of God out of Judah," and "an old prophet in Bethel."

Jeroboam had received a definite word from God through the prophet Ahijah, that he should reign over the ten tribes of Israel; and, he was told, that if he would hearken unto God’s commands, walk in God’s ways, and keep the statutes and commandments of the LORD, God would be with him and establish his house. Alas! when Jeroboam came to the throne, instead of depending upon God and His word he sought to establish his kingdom by his own devices. Having no faith in God he fell back on natural reason, and human schemes to keep the professing people of God together. So acting, he sealed the doom of his kingdom by setting up two golden calves, and saving to the people, "Behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt" (1 Kings 12:28). One calf he set in Bethel and the other in Dan. The solemn result was the people became worshippers of these false gods, "sacrificing unto the calves;" and were thus led into apostacy. Bethel, where Jacob had set up a pillar as a witness to God’s unconditional promise of blessing to the seed of Jacob, and God’s unchanging faithfulness to His own word, becomes the witness to man’s sin and apostacy. Through their leaders the enemy had succeeded in undermining the people’s confidence in God and thus separating them from Him.

God, however, raised up a witness against this fearful evil. He sent a man of God out of Judah to Bethel to condemn the wickedness of Jeroboam. "By the word of the LORD," this man was enlightened as to the evil in Bethel. He learnt that this evil was so abhorrent to God that the day was soon coming when God would deal with it in judgment (v. 1, 2). He was directed by sign and word to witness against the evil (v. 3). He was specially warned against weakening his testimony by associating with the evil. He was to deliver his message, give his sign, and then depart. On no account was he to eat bread, or drink water, at Bethel, nor was he to turn again by the same way that he came. He was to have no fellowship with the false position of those who, while professing to be the people of God, were walking in disobedience to the word of the LORD (v. 9, 10). With great faithfulness the man of God delivers his message and gives the sign, which comes to pass. The enraged king charges his servants to lay hold of the man of God, who is silent in the presence of threats and acts in interceding grace when God smites the man by whom he is threatened. Finally he is proof against the king’s offer of rewards, and, in obedience to the word of the LORD, firmly refuses to eat or drink at Bethel. In all these ways the man of God faithfully discharges his mission, and yet withal in a spirit of grace, while firmly refusing to be drawn into association with

evil.

Passing on to the latter part of this instructive story, we find that faithfulness to the word of the LORD is put to a further and yet severer test. This portion of the story is introduced with the significant words: — "Now there dwelt an old prophet in Bethel" (v. 11). In the very place of the evil that the man of God was sent to denounce, and with which the LORD said he was not to have any association by eating or drinking — in this place, a brother prophet had found his dwelling. He was truly a prophet, and was aware of the evil, but, dwelling in a wrong association he not only was unable to witness against it, but actually put his sanction upon it. It is through this "brother" and "prophet" that the obedience of the man of God is put to the test. It is a severe test, for not only could this old man plead that he was a brother and a prophet, but he could plead the experience of age. Moreover, he shows much gracious hospitality to a weary and hungry brother. "Come home," he says, "with me, and eat bread." Above all he claims that an angel had given him "the word of the LORD" to bring the man of God back to his house. To refuse such an appeal would appear to be putting a slight upon a brother prophet. It would also have the appearance of disrespect for old age, it would look like indifference to brotherly kindness that was so ready to show hospitality. Above all it would have the appearance of ignoring the direct word of the LORD by an angel. Yet the story clearly shows that behind all these specious reasons that nature might plead, there was the effort of the enemy to undermine the word of the Lord by involving the man of God in a wrong association.

How does the man of God act in the presence of this strong and subtle temptation? Alas! apparently on the plea of respect for old age, response to brotherly kindness, fellowship with a fellow-servant, and professed obedience to the word of the LORD, though this communication of the old prophet plainly invalidated and contradicted his first instructions from God, he allowed himself to be drawn into a wrong association by disobedience to them. An old prophet may alas! become a deceiver and seduce one from loyalty and obedience.

It is easy to see how serious was this disobedience to the word of God.

First, in turning back to eat and drink with the old prophet at Bethel, the man of God put his sanction on an association which God’s word condemned.

Secondly, he put his sanction upon the unfaithfulness of the old prophet in living in such an association.

Thirdly, he nullified his own testimony by sanctioning the very evil against which he was sent to witness.

What, we may ask, should have kept the man of God from falling into this snare? His own word gives the answer, for he confesses, "So was it charged me by the word of the LORD, saying, eat no bread, nor drink water, nor turn again by the same way that thou camest." Evidently, then, his safe-guard against every effort to draw him into a false association was unswerving obedience to the word of God. In reference to this scene one has truly said, "Whenever God has made His will known to us, we are not to allow any after influence whatever to call it in question, even although the latter may take the form of the word of God . . . In every case our part is to obey what He has said."

If the word of God charged him not to eat and drink at Bethel, in spite of the fact that a brother prophet was dwelling there, was the man of God to turn back and eat and drink because a brother prophet was at Bethel? If his eye had been single would he not have discerned why the word of God so strictly forbad him to associate with the old prophet? How was it that, when God was denouncing evil at Bethel, He has to send a prophet from Judah, seeing there was already a prophet at Bethel? Does not this action tell us that the old prophet at Bethel was not himself separate from evil, and therefore not a vessel fit and meet for the Master's use? Being in a false position the old prophet was ready to go to great lengths to get the man of God to sanction his unfaithfulness by associating with it. Alas! the man of God fell into the snare and destroyed his own testimony by associating with one who, while admitting the evil, yet bore with it.

Thus, as it has been truly said, of this man of God, "He is proof against temptation when presented in the form of evil, and he falls when tempted by apparent good. The voice of a brother, his standing and reputation, are honoured above the word of God. He disobeys God and accredits a lie in his brother . . . He triumphed over the opposition of the world without, and is seduced into unfaithfulness by a brother within." By abstaining from eating and drinking with the king he took God's part against the evil: by returning to eat and drink with the old prophet he took his part in associating with it. The last part of the story (verses 20 to 32) clearly shows that God is not indifferent to the unfaithfulness of the old prophet nor the failure of the man of God. In the governmental ways of God both come under His chastening. The old prophet is justly punished inasmuch as God compels him to expose his own duplicity by pronouncing judgment upon the man of God. As to the man of God, he has to learn that, if he regards the word of his brother more than the word of God, the very one by whom he has been drawn into disobedience will be the instrument in God's hand for exposing his sin. The severity of the judgment that overtakes the man of God clearly shows how deeply God resented his disobedience. The LORD had given this man of God great light as to the evil of Bethel and His abhorrence of it, and the judgment that was coming upon it. Great honour had been put upon him in being used as a witness against the evil. God had plainly warned him against being entangled in a false association. In spite of light, and privilege, and warning he allowed himself to be drawn into a false association with the result that in spite of all former faithfulness, and boldness. his career as a witness for God is closed on earth. It is no small matter to disregard the word of God and sin against the light.

Nevertheless we are permitted to see that if God, in His holiness, has to chasten His people for their failure and unfaithfulness, yet He is not unrighteous to forget any work or labour of love that has been shown toward His Name. So it comes to pass that three hundred and fifty years after these events. when Josiah carries out the word of the Lord. by the man of God, and burns the bones of the false prophets, he spares the sepulchre of the man of God who came from Judah and the old prophet of Bethel. Through their unfaithfulness, the people of God may come under His chastening: but, through the faithfulness of God they will not share in the judgment that overtakes the world (2 Kings 23:15-18). In seeking to apply the lessons of this striking story, we do well to remember three great facts:-

First, in the day in which we live there has been, by the grace of God, a recovery of the great truths concerning Christ and the Church as revealed in the word of God.

Secondly, in the light of the recovery of the truth many have had their eyes opened to see how far Christendom has departed from the truth. Like the man out of Judah, we see that, as it was in Israel, so in Christendom, the corrupt condition of the professing mass is leading to apostacy and judgment.

Thirdly, with our eyes opened to see the departure from the truth, we have also been enlightened as to God’s mind for the individual believer in relation to the corruption of Christendom. We have learned that the knowledge of the truth on the one hand, and the corruption of Christendom on the other, demands entire separation from that which is a denial of the truth and is coming under the judgment of God.

Christendom has organized itself into a number of systems and denominations which form a religion established on earth, having a human order of priests between the people and God — a religion suited to man in the flesh. Such a religion was Judaism, and such Christendom has become. God calls this system "the Camp," and from such, true believers are exhorted "To go forth ... unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach" (Hebrews 12:13),

Moreover, we read, "Let everyone that nameth the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity," and, again, we are to "purge" ourselves from vessels to dishonour, and "flee also youthful lusts" (2 Timothy 2:19-22).

Thus the word of God makes it very clear that in a day of ruin the separation to which we are called is both ecclesiastical and personal. Alas! there may be one without the other. We may be truly separate from the ecclesiastical evil and yet fail in personal holiness. Or there may be personal separation, as in the church at Sardis where there were a few names which had not defiled their garments, but no separation from a lifeless and condemned ecclesiastical system. True separation to Christ combines both. And, as in the days of the man of God from Judah, so in ours, the power of our testimony will be in proportion to the reality of our separation. This being so, those who have gone without the Camp unto Christ will find, as with the man of God from Judah, all the efforts of the enemy will be directed to marring their testimony by once again drawing them into associations condemned by the word of God. To gain his ends the devil employs today the same devices by which he sought to encompass the downfall of the man of God. First, he will seek to entangle us in false associations by some worldly advantage that the association may offer, even as he sought to entice the man of God into disobedience to the word of God by the King’s rewards. Secondly, having failed to turn us aside by this device he will endeavour to do so by the much more subtle device of a fellow Christian in a false position.

Many, like the man of God of old, may firmly reject the first device only to fall by the second. We may see that the association is condemned by the word of God, and one, if there were no Christians in it, that we should have nothing to do with. This being so we may well ask ourselves, Are we right in going back into a false association under the plea that Christians are there? If God calls us out of the Camp, in spite of some remaining in the Camp, can it be right to return to the Camp because they are there?

Nevertheless the appeal to go back often comes with great force and under many specious pleas. Brotherly love, old friendships, the desire to help the Lord’s people and strengthen the things that remain, may all be used as reasons for going back into associations condemned by the word of

God. Moreover, we have the flesh in us, and at times the call to go back may flatter the vanity and self-importance of the natural heart. Nor can we shut our eyes to the fact that the brother. who seeks to draw us back, also has the flesh in him, and, as with the old prophet of Bethel, may seek to draw us into a wrong association with the low motive of seeking to justify himself in that false position. The fact that we have left associations condemned by the word of God, is in itself a testimony against them. To go back is to annul our testimony and, in principle, build again the things we have destroyed.

Moreover, we may well ask, Does the brother by going back into a false association really help the Christians in the false position? Or, will he by so doing deliver such from a false association? It is evident that the man of God by eating and drinking at Bethel in disobedience to the word of God, neither helped the old prophet nor delivered him from his false position

Furthermore, by going back into wrong associations are we not in danger of not only destroying our testimony against the evil, but also, like the man of God from Judah, ending our career as a witness for the truth?

It is only as we walk in unswerving obedience to the word of God, that we shall escape the devices of the enemy to draw us back into the wrong position. Let us then seek that the word may have its absolute authority over our souls, and be content to take the outside path with all its obscurity, content if the Lord can say of us, "Thou hast a little strength, and hast kept My word and hast not denied My Name" (Revelation 3:8). H. S.

S. The Outlook

The Outlook

Hamilton Smith, (Extracted from Scripture Truth magazine Volume7, 1915, page 236.) The fact that the war is practically confined to professedly Christian countries, surely proclaims, with no uncertain voice, that God has a controversy with Christendom. We may well inquire, Why has God in the ways of His providence, allowed this fearful evil to come? In seeking to answer this question we must remember that God has revealed Himself to men in three great ways. First, as the Creator of the universe (Genesis 1:1-31). Second, as the Judge of all the earth (Genesis 18:25). Third, as the Saviour God who will have all men to be saved (1 Timothy 2:1-15). AS CREATOR, God has set all His creatures in certain relationships to one another, instituting the whole circle of family relationships. AS THE JUDGE OF ALL THE EARTH, God has ordained certain powers for the government of the world, such as kings, rulers, and magistrates, into whose hands He has committed the sword, for the purpose of restraining evil, and the punishment of evil-doers. AS THE SAVIOUR-GOD, He has declared His grace, in proclaiming the forgiveness of sins among all nations; through faith in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus.

How then has the world answered to this threefold revelation? Alas! is it not manifest that God has been denied — His rights refused and His mercy spurned in every way in which He has been pleased to reveal Himself, and that not only in the dark parts of the earth, where all idea of God has long since been lost, but in Christendom — professing to have the true knowledge of God ? In the scientific world, boasting of intellect and learning, the leaders of science have flouted the idea of a Creator, and sought to explain "life" and all "natural phenomena" apart from God. The mass, confused by a display of learning, is quite willing to accept evolution, or any other wild theory of man’s infidel mind; and thus all thought of God, as Creator, is fading from the minds of men. But in giving up God as the Creator, there necessarily follows the loosening of all those relationships which the Creator instituted. Thus we see, on all hands, family relationships breaking up, and, as the inevitable result, an enormous increase of immorality and corruption. In the political world, the government of the world is conducted increasingly without any reference to God. Men pass their laws, make treaties, enter into alliances, go to war, and patch up peace, according to the will of the people, and without any thought of God. And, leaving God out, the door has been left open for every kind of political unrighteousness. Truth is displaced by diplomatic lying; principle has to give place to policy; right has to go down before might. The power of the sword, instead of being used to restrain evil, becomes the instrument of expressing the cruelty, lust, and hatred of men attempting to rule without God; and thus violence fills the earth. In the religious world, in Christendom (of which we speak), we find on the one hand a number of professedly orthodox sects, and, on the other hand, an ever-increasing number of anti-Christian sects. The anti-Christian sects, such as Christian Science, Millennial Dawnism, Seventh Day Adventists, Christadelphianism, Mormonism, the Tongues Movement, and others, are all alike in this, that they more or less plainly deny the Deity of Christ and His atoning work. But what of the professedly orthodox sects? Alas! we find in nearly all these, that "Higher Criticism" has undermined implicit

faith in the Bible as the Word of God; gross materialism refuses all that is miraculous — the virgin birth of Christ, the miracles of Christ, and the resurrection of Christ; Unitarianism (no longer confined to Unitarians) denies the Deity of Christ; a barren morality, expressing itself in good works to men, displaces the atoning work of Christ; human organization sets aside the Spirit of God: humanitarianism denies eternal punishment, and a gross worldliness excludes all belief in the coming of Christ. Men of the religious world are treading "under foot the Son of God," counting "the blood of the covenant an unholy thing," and doing "despite unto the spirit of grace." The eastern section of that which professes the name of Christ is marked by idolatry; the western section is characterized either by the superstition of Rome or the rationalism of Protestant countries. But all these evils — idolatry, superstition, and materialism — lead by different roads to the same end — practical infidelity, or the entire exclusion of God, in fact, if not in name.

Whether then we look at the intellectual world, the political world, or the religious world — in every sphere — we find the same terrible sin, the FORSAKING OF GOD. But what about true Christians? For in the midst of this corrupt Christendom there are thousands upon thousands of the true disciples of Christ — men and women — in whom God has wrought by His Spirit. Scripture speaks of them "as the salt of the earth." But how comes it then that they exercise so small a preserving effect upon the world? The exhortation of the Lord was plain: "Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another." Alas, so far are they from preserving the world that they have not even kept themselves pure and unspotted from its evil; so far from maintaining peace in the world, they have not even maintained peace among themselves; indeed so far are they from maintaining peace among themselves that they have become a scandal and a byword through their perpetual quarrels and divisions. So that, in spite of the fact that there are devoted men of God in the world, must we not sorrowfully confess that, speaking generally, the Lord’s people are marked by loss of first love; by following what is right in their own eyes rather than holding the Head; by a narrow sectarianism instead of viewing one another as members of the body of Christ; by bitterness rather than love to one another; by worldliness and earthly-mindedness instead of maintaining the stranger and pilgrim character of the heavenly calling; by ease and sloth rather than energy and zeal in the service of the Lord? Thus it has come to pass that the salt has largely lost its savour. View Christendom how we will, on every hand we are faced with failure and ruin.

What a world lies under the eye of a holy God! Heathendom without the knowledge of God: Mohammedanism with a perverted knowledge of God: Christendom forsaking God: and the mass of true Christians backsliding from God.

God bears long with evil, but there comes a time when the glory of His name demands that in His providential government men should hear His voice; that they should reap the widespread sorrow which is only the harvest of their departure from God. But how solemn must be the condition of Christendom which makes such a catastrophe, so far — reaching and overwhelming, a necessity, for we may be sure that if anything less than this would have been enough to awaken men from their sinful indifference to God, and to awaken Christians also from their selfish slumbers, this would not have been permitted, for God is full of mercy.

After long patience God in His governmental ways has drawn a sword upon the nations, and said, "Sword, go through the land" (Ezekiel 14:17). Every professedly Christian nation is directly or.

indirectly involved in this terrific conflict, the end of which no man can foresee. It has touched all from the highest to the lowest, believers and unbelievers, involving millions in sorrow, ruin, desolation, and death. And in the midst of all this sorrow where can the Christian find relief? To whom can the Christian turn? To the world? Alas there is no hope there! To the Christians in the world? Alas there is little hope there! To whom then can we turn? To GOD alone; "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in ME is thine help" (Hosea 13:9). God remains, and with God there is no change. "Thou remainest," and "Thou art the Same." The world looks to its millions and its munitions, its armies and its navies, to end the war. Let the Christians wait on God, that His end may be reached: "My soul, wait thou only upon God, for my expectation is from Him" (Psalms 62:5). Let us look beyond all second causes, and accept this terrible discipline from God: "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" (Amos 3:6).

Let us confess our failure, and seek that there may be, by the Spirit, a great revival in the hearts of God's people, and then let us pass on, and, pleading the mercy of God, send up a united cry for peace in the world. As Christians we have failed greatly, but our failure does not lessen our responsibility to cry to God that souls may receive eternal blessing, and that peace may be restored and maintained while God's people are yet in the world. When the people of God were in captivity, the Lord sent them a message by Jeremiah, saying, "Seek ye the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace" (Jeremiah 29:7). The people who were thus told to pray were a failing people. The city they were told to pray for was a doomed city. Nevertheless they were to pray. We might think it hardly decent for such people to pray for others, and quite useless to pray for such a city. But no I for while the Lord fully recognizes the shame of His people, and that His hand was upon them in judgment, for He says, "I have caused you to be carried away captive," and yet He continues, "Pray unto the Lord for the city," for His mercy is very great.

It is our responsibility and privilege to make "supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving thanks . . . for all men; for kings, and for all in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all piety and gravity," and above all that the gospel may be proclaimed in accordance with the desire of God our Saviour, "who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:1-6). May the Lord turn the hearts of all His people to Himself, in individual as well as in united prayer, and intercession, for "who knoweth if He will return and repent and leave a blessing behind Him?" (Joel 2:14). The rulers of this world know how to leave sorrow and the curse behind them, this the widows and the orphans, the ruined and the broken-hearted can rise up to tell: but God — God alone — out of all this woe can leave a "blessing behind Him." And when this present misery shall for ever have passed away, like some evil dream, will not many a soul look back to this sad time, "And bless the hand that guided, And bless the heart that planned When throned where glory dwelleth In Immanuel's land"?

Chapter 73

S. The Path of Life and Separation.

The Path of Life and Separation.

Hamilton Smith. The Path of Life.

Psalms 16:1-11

It has been truly said there was no path in the garden of Eden. An innocent man in a garden of delights had only to remain where God had placed him. He needed no path to lead him out of such a scene. Then again there will be no path in heaven. A holy man in a perfect scene will have no desire to leave it. We shall need no path in heaven. In a ruined world there is, and of necessity must be, a path through it, and out of it; for in such a world none can stay. The guilty man cannot stay, the godly man would not if he could. From the gates of Eden man became a wanderer in a fallen world — a sinner who, from the moment he enters the world, treads a path that leads out of the world by death — the path of death. For the believer, however, there is another path — the path of life. "A path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture's eye hath not seen: the lion's whelps have not trodden it, nor the fierce lion passed by it" (Job 28:7-8). It lies beyond the range of nature's keenest vision, and nature's greatest strength. The wit of man has never discovered it, and the might of man will never tread it. Like the path of death it passes through a world of sorrow, yea through the valley of the shadow of death, but, unlike the path of death, it leads into the presence of the LORD where there is fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore. This path, which could never be discovered by nature, has been disclosed by grace, and trodden in perfection by a perfect Man — the Man Christ Jesus. There has been One here to whom, by reason of His intrinsic perfection, the path of life could be disclosed. The Lord Jesus can say, "Thou wilt show Me the path of life;" and every step of that path He has trodden in perfection, and reached the goal at the right hand of God. Moreover in treading the path He becomes the perfect example for His people, and sets their feet in the path that He has trodden, for His last words ere He left this scene were "Follow Me." We indeed may tread this path with faltering steps and many a stumble, but, as our pattern, and for our encouragement, Christ has gone before us in the path. The Lord is Himself gone before;

He has mark'd out the path that we tread;

It's as sure as the love we adore, We have nothing to fear nor to dread.

It is this path that is so blessedly traced for us in the sixteenth Psalm. Seeing the path trodden by Christ in perfection we cannot but admire it; and what we admire we imitate.

Before we seek to trace the blessedness of this path, let us ask ourselves "What is the life to which the Lord refers when He speaks of the path of life?" There is the common round of life with all its varied duties and relationships — a life which is enacted on earth, bounded by time and ended by death. There is too the life of service and conflict with the enemy; but this again is limited to an earthly sphere. The "life" of which the Lord speaks is not confined to earth, limited to time, or

touched by death. It is the inner life lived, with God and before God. A "life" indeed that is lived on earth, that sustains the soul in its passage through time and death, that is enjoyed in fulness at the right hand of God, and endures for evermore. It is this life that is so blessedly set before us in the Sixteenth Psalm. Being the "inner life" of communion with God, it is a life that is independent of circumstances, though sustaining us in circumstances. For this reason adverse circumstances have little place in the Psalm. They are recognised, for a godless world, death and the grave are mentioned, but only as the dark background of a life which can be lived untouched by evil in a world of evil. Who could overrate the blessedness of such a life: as one has said, "This living relationship with God casts a light, a halo on all; it lights the soul up with such a direct consciousness of divine blessing that nothing is like it, save the full realization of it in the presence of God. A man with God, enjoying Him in a nature capable of doing so with all the necessary result where it shall be fulfilled without a cloud — a man as Christ was in this world with God — is the most perfect joy possible, save the everlasting fulfilment of all known and felt in it."

How true this is and yet how easily we may neglect this "inner life." Assured of our standing before God we may be careful that the outward life shall be correct before men, and maintain activity in service, while little exercised as to the inner life before God. Let us however remember that right walk before men as well as true service for Christ, is the outcome of the life lived before God. With these introductory remarks let us pass on to consider this "inner life" as set forth in Christ. Twice in the New Testament the Psalm is applied to Christ. The Apostle Peter quotes verses 8-11 to prove the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2:25-28): and the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews applies the principle of the first verse (if not directly quoting it) to prove the participation of Christ in human nature (Hebrews 2:13). Thus we have the warrant of Scripture for applying the Psalm to Christ personally.

1. CHRIST THE DEPENDENT MAN. The Psalm opens by presenting Christ as the perfectly dependent Man. "Preserve Me, O God," is the language of dependence. The first great principle of the inner life lived before God is dependence. It is natural for man to be dependent upon his God, nevertheless fallen man would rather be dependent upon anything and anyone but God. In Christ there was found at last upon earth a Man who was wholly dependent upon the power of God to preserve Him at every step of His path. He could indeed have preserved Himself; nevertheless in grace He takes a place as the dependent Man. "We understand dependence on God when we are in a strait, but dependence upon God pure and simple when we have resources in our possession is little known. fill the resources of creation were at His command, all the host of heaven were ready to do His bidding when He said, 'Preserve Me, O God.'"

2. CHRIST THE CONFIDING MAN.

"In Thee do I put my trust" is the language of confidence. Christ's perfect dependence upon God was the outcome of His perfect confidence in God. He had unbounded confidence in boundless love. The storm that the devil raised found Christ in calm sleep with His head on a pillow. The real pillow of His heart was the Father's love. As the perfect Man He can say "In Thee do I put my trust," and sleep in the storm; then as the mighty God He rises up, saying, "Peace be still" and calms the storm. It has been truly said "The storms drive us home, but the storm found Him at home." The storms that send us to the Father found Him with the Father. Nothing ever moved Him from dependence upon the Father's power and confidence in the Father's love. He has gone, but

He has left His pillow behind Him, for the Father’s love is our portion.

3. CHRIST THE SUBJECT MAN. A third great characteristic of the inner life comes before us in the second verse. "O my soul, thou hast said unto the LORD, thou art my Lord." This is the expression of One who takes the place of subjection and obedience to the will of another. A life of absolute subjection to the sovereign will of God at all times is an intolerable thought to the natural man, yet this is the path of life and joy. To do the will of One whose infinite love has purposed me for eternal blessing, and whose divine power and wisdom is carrying out His purposes, must be the way of blessing. This path of subjection to the will of Another has been trodden in perfection by Christ as Man. Coming into the world He could say. "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O my God:" passing through it He could say, "I do always those things that please Him:" passing out of it He could say, "Not my will but Thine be done." There has been One here who in all circumstances, and at all times — moment by moment — did nothing but the will of God. When the storm of opposition was rising on every hand He can say, "Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight." The clouds that thickened round His path ever found Him confiding in the Father’s love and subject to the Father’s will. And when that greatest of all storms — the storm that was over our heads — was about to burst on His head, He is still confiding in the Father’s love, for He can say, "The cup which my Father hath given Me shall I not drink it:" and still subject to the Father’s will, for He adds, "Not my will but shine be done." In Psalms 2:1-12, Christ is the Subjugator who will put down all insubjection with a rod of iron. Blessed it is to know that One is coming who will deal with all the lawlessness of the world and bring all into subjection to the will of God. This however is not wonderful when we remember who He is — God’s anointed King. In Psalms 8:1-9, we are carried on to a time when the whole creation is brought into subjection to Christ, as we read, "Thou hast put all things under His feet." Blessed indeed will this be, but again we say hardly wonderful when we remember who He is — the Son of Man crowned with glory and honour.

When, however, we come to Psalms 16:1-11, we learn that the One, who will subjugate everything to God, to whom all is to be put into subjection, has Himself been the perfectly subject Man. This indeed is a wonder for our souls to contemplate; and yet, may we not say that His power to subject the whole universe to Himself lies in the fact that He, Himself, was once the perfectly subject Man.

Thus the opening verses of the Psalm present these three great characteristics of the path of life — dependence upon the power of God, confidence in the love of God and subjection to the will of God.

4. CHRIST THE LOWLY MAN.

Another beautiful characteristic of the path of life, perfectly exemplified in the life of Christ, is its lowliness. Speaking as a Man Christ could say to God, "My goodness extendeth not to Thee;" speaking of the saints that are on the earth — the excellent — He could say, "In them is all my delight’’ (N. Tr.). The saints and the excellent of the earth are not often found among ’’the princes of this world." We do well to remember the words of the Apostle to the carnally minded Corinthians. "Ye see your calling brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called, but God hath chosen the foolish. . . the weak. .. the base. . . and the things which are despised." It is among such that "the excellent" will be found, and it was with such that the Lord, in His lowly grace, identified Himself. If we would have the company of Christ we must also have the company of the lowly of this world, for it is with them He will be

found. If Simon the Pharisee invites the Lord of glory to his house he finds that he must also have the company of the woman of the city. Nor was it simply that Christ associated with the lowly, but He delighted in them. His was the lowly mind. He could say "I am meek and lowly in heart." It was not only lowliness of manner or lowliness of speech — which indeed we can easily affect — it was lowliness of heart. The word for our guidance is, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus;" and again, "in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves."

5. CHRIST THE SEPARATE MAN. In the pathway of Christ as the perfect Man, He would allow nothing to come in between His soul and God. He would pay no homage to the objects which men worship, nor take up their names upon His lips. An idol is not necessarily an actual image that is worshipped in place of the true God. It is anything that is allowed to come, as an object of the heart's affections between the soul and God; hence, even to believers, the Apostle can write, "Little children keep yourselves from idols." Alas how often we turn aside to pursue objects that come between our souls and God, only to find the truth of the Psalmist's words, "Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another." It has been said that an innocent man had no object, he simply had to enjoy God's goodness: a fallen man has many objects which separate the heart from God; but the new man has one Object, "For me to live is Christ," and again, "The life which I now live .... I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me."

6. CHRIST THE SATISFIED MAN. Not only was Christ the separate Man, He was the perfectly satisfied Man. He could say, "The LORD is the portion of my inheritance and of my cup." The inheritance is that to which we are travelling on — the permanent portion of the soul; the cup is rather what is enjoyed by the way. The inheritance is ours by title, the cup is the measure of present enjoyment of the inheritance. The LORD is the portion of our inheritance and the LORD is the cup; thus the cup is not the enjoyment of circumstances by the way, but rather the enjoyment of the Lord in the circumstances. The circumstances may be sorrowful wilderness circumstances, as in Psalms 23:1-6, and yet, says the Psalmist, "My cup runneth over." The taste of the Lord that he had in the circumstances gave Him overflowing joy. Such, in perfection, was the experience of the Lord in the midst of the sorrows of His path. At the most sorrowful moment of His life, when rejected by Israel and misunderstood by His own, we read, "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth." He was tasting of the cup by the way, while looking on to the inheritance of all things, for He can add, "All things are delivered unto Me of My Father."

It is ours to know we have a glorious inheritance, to taste the cup by the way, and realize that the inheritance is kept for us, "Thou maintainest my lot." To drink of this cup is to enter into the blessedness of the inheritance, and in so doing we are occupied with that which abides — that which will be maintained — in contrast to hastening after the things of a world which "passeth away and the lust thereof." In passing through a world of death, the Lord, by reason of His circumstances, was a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; but with the "goodly heritage" in view, He could say, "The lines have fallen unto Me in pleasant places."

7. CHRIST THE GUIDED MAN.

We realize in deeper measure how perfectly Christ has entered into Manhood as we hear Him say, "I will bless the LORD, who hath given me counsel." The One who gives divine counsel as God — whose name is Wonderful and Counsellor — is the One who received counsel as Man. No man,

as such, is able in his own wisdom to take the path of life in a world of sin. At every step, amidst the confusions of sin and self-will we need divine counsel. If, as the prophet says, we are to know how "to speak a word in season to him that is weary,'' we must have the ear opened "morning by morning . . . to hear as the learner." And this again is the language of the Lord. As Man He walked by the daily counsel of God. How necessary that we should be daily at His feet to hear His word.

Moreover there is not only divine counsel to guide, but also spiritual intelligence (Colossians 1:9-10). The "reins" would set forth this spiritual intelligence that forms the guiding principles of the soul. Such intelligence sees God's way with clearer vision when the soul is withdrawn from the influences of the busy world around, as in the retirement of the night seasons. Then indeed the spiritual intelligence, quickened by divine counsel, will see more clearly the path of life through a world of sin and death.

8. CHRIST THE SUPPORTED MAN. To tread the path of life it is not enough to have 1 divine counsel an d spiritual intelligence, we also need divine support. This too is seen in perfection in the Lord's path as a Man. He could say, "I have set the LORD always before Me," and, having the LORD before Him, He was conscious of the LORD with Him, — "He is at my right hand;" and with the LORD at His right hand, He can add, "I shall not be moved." It is our privilege to follow the Lord in this path, though He alone could say, "I have set the LORD always before Me." Alas it is not "always" with us; we have not "always" the single eye that has no object but Christ. If it is not money or some gross object, it may be self in some form that we have before us. Self-ease, self-gratification or self-exaltation may obscure the vision of our souls; but when the eye is single — when Christ is the one object — then indeed we shall have the sense of the Lord's presence with us, and, when He is with us, we "shall not be moved." In the world around there may be a babel of contending voices, and amongst the people of God much confusion, but supported by the Lord we shall not be moved.

9. CHRIST THE REJOICING MAN. The path of life, trodden by the Lord, led through death. Not death as making atonement for His people, but as setting forth the blessedness of a life that death cannot touch. It is the path of life through death. Here the prospect of death raises no cloud upon His spirit. So far from being cast down at the thought of death, His heart is glad, His tongue rejoiceth, for His flesh will rest in hope. For the one treading the path of life, death is but a means to the fuller enjoyment of the life. At the moment when the natural man treading the path of death is filled with gloom and apprehension the one treading the path of life is marked by joy, praise and the rest of hope. The secret of this joy is found in having the glorious end in view. The path of life may pass through a world of sorrow, may lead through the valley of the shadow of death, but it ends at last in the presence of God. For Christ, and those that are Christ's, this indeed is the Father's presence. This is more than glory, it is the Father's house where the Father's heart is displayed and the Father Himself is fully known and enjoyed. Here amidst the sorrows of earth we may taste the cup of life, there amidst the joys of heaven we shall enter upon the fulness of life. Here there are pleasures by the way, there are found the pleasures for evermore.

Such was the inner life that the Lord as Man lived with God, and before God as He passed through this world. Such a life was unknown to an innocent man in Eden and impossible to a fallen man in the world. Only a holy Man passing through this world could live a life marked by dependence upon the power of God, confidence in the love of God and subjection to the will of God: a life of

lowliness that associated with the morally excellent of the earth, while maintaining separation from the evil of the world: a life of satisfaction with the inheritance to come: a life in which there is divine guidance and divine support: a life which death cannot touch or the grave close, and that leads to the presence of God where there is fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore. A life counselled for us by the Father's heart. in which we have the support of the Father's hand, until at last we enter upon its fulness in the Father's home.

Only in Christ do we see the life lived in its absolute perfection. But the life lived in perfection by Christ is possible for His people in the power of the Holy Spirit. THE PATH OF SEPARATION.

Matthew 13:53-58,Matthew 14:1-36. In this important passage the footsteps of the Lord lead us into the path of separation from a world that has rejected Christ. Four scenes pass before us — the country, the court, the desert and the stormy sea. Rejected by the world the Lord takes a place outside "His own country," "His own house," the king's court, the peoples' cities, and the disciples' ship (Matthew 13:57; Matthew 14:13, Matthew 14:23). As we trace the Lord's steps we learn the gain and blessedness of following the Lord into this path of separation. In the first two scenes — the country and the court — we discover the true character of the world around us. In the last two scenes — the desert, and the sea — we discover the fulness of our resources in Christ in the outside place.

1. HIS OWN COUNTRY — Matthew 13:53-58. In the fulfilment of His service of love the Lord had taken the lowest place and associated with the common people. He became poor that we through His poverty might be rich. Thus He is found again in "His own country" and among His own people in despised Nazareth. Alas! even so these simple country folk are marked by the pride of the flesh that refuses to accept One who comes in lowly guise. They listen to His words of wisdom, and gaze with wonder at His works of power, but they say, "Is He not connected with the family of the carpenter? His mother, and brothers, and sisters are they not well known to us?" Social pride refuses to receive divine truths from One whose family is so low in the social scale; who is outside the circle of their religious officials, and comes to them without human credentials. He is rejected by "His own country" and "His own house."

2. THE COURT OF THE KING — Matthew 14:1-12. The simple country people have rejected Christ, but what of the higher circles — what of the court of the king? It is true that Christ personally is not found in the court, but the treatment meted out to the Forerunner of Christ is a sure indication of the rejection of Christ Himself by the leaders of the people. In the court of Herod we get a true picture of this world marked by corruption and violence. The lust of the flesh had led the ruler of the people into an infamous alliance with his brother Philip's wife. Unable to gainsay the rebukes of a godly man, and influenced by a wicked woman, he degrades justice by casting a righteous man into prison; and is only restrained from murder by the fear of the people. Then comes a day when the lust of the eye, finding a passing gratification in the charms of a dancing girl, leads the frivolous king into a rash oath. Finally the pride of life leads him to commit murder to maintain his paltry ideas of honour.

Thus in these two scenes one in "His own country," the other in King Herod's court — we have a complete picture of this present evil world, marked by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Moreover they present a twofold witness to the rejection of Christ. Neither country nor court will receive Christ, or any witness to Christ. All classes agree in rejecting One whose

lowliness wounds their pride, and whose holiness opposes their lusts. At different times the world may express itself in different forms, for the fashions of this world change but at heart it is ever the same. The Lord was surrounded by the world of corrupt Judaism, we are faced with the world of corrupt Christendom. Outwardly there are differences, at heart they are alike marked by lust and pride, violence and corruption.

3. THE DESERT PLACE — Matthew 14:13-21. The world depicted in the first two scenes cannot tolerate the presence of Christ, and is entirely unsuited to Christ. It rejects Christ and is rejected by Christ. The Lord accepts the murder of His Forerunner as the sure token of His own rejection, and, leaving country and court, "He departed . . . into a desert place apart." In this outside place He becomes the attractive centre of the needy. "They followed Him on foot out of the cities." Driven by their need and drawn by His grace, they follow Him into the path of separation. So with ourselves; we have needs as sinners and needs as saints, and no one in all this world can meet one need or the other. As sinners we need a Saviour to relieve us of our sins and all that lies upon us as of a fallen race; as believers we need an object to satisfy our hearts. Thus we are drawn to Him outside this world, that has become to us a desert by reason of the spiritual needs that have been awakened in our souls, to find in Jesus One who can make the desert rejoice and blossom as the rose.

Coming to Him in the outside place we discover, like the needy multitudes of old, His deep perfections. We discern, as they did, that He is not One that has to be constrained to bless, but One who is willing and ready to bless, as we read "Jesus went forth" to meet them. The father ran to meet the returning prodigal, and "Jesus went forth" to meet these needy souls (14).

Moreover in His company we find ourselves in the presence of One who fully appreciates our needs, for we read, He "saw a great multitude." We see but little of our need, or the need of others, but His gaze takes in "a great multitude." He sees our need in all its vast extent.

Further, not only has He divine knowledge of our need, but divine compassion for us in our misery. He "was moved with compassion toward them." His heart of love feels for us as no other heart can ever feel.

Moreover with Christ there is power to meet the need, for we read, "He healed their sick." With Christ it is not compassion without power, nor power without compassion, as with others. His heart and His hand are at our disposal; and the hand that heals is moved by a heart that loves.

How blessed to have found in Christ, in the outside place, One who is willing to bless, who has divine knowledge of our need, who has a heart that can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, anal a hand that is able to meet our-needs. And we discover these resources in Christ in the place of our need. In the day of glory we shall still enjoy His infinite perfections but in the dark and cloudy day we learn His perfections. We learn them where we need them, like the multitude of old; for the time was evening, the place a desert, and the people hungry.

However Christ is with them, and the disciples take the right course; they "Come to Him." They turn to the One with the perfect knowledge, infinite love, and divine power. Who can turn to Him in vain, though, at times, He may have lessons to teach us before He intervenes on our behalf? He would have us to realize our need, and, what is more difficult to learn, our own utter weakness and utter incapacity to meet our need. It was thus with the disciples, To bring home to them their own

weakness, the Lord can say "Give ye them to eat." At once they have to confess they have but five loaves and two small fishes. They realize not only that they are a needy people in a darkening scene and a desert place, but that their own resources are utterly insufficient to meet their need. They are shut up to Christ. And this is still where Christ would bring us in all our difficulties, for here He can meet us and act on our behalf. So at once the Lord says, "Bring them hither to Me." — ME — the One who knows, who loves, and who has the power to meet the need. And still in all our difficulties, our trials, our sorrows, our exercises and our failures, He is saying "Bring them hither to Me." He invites us to come in all our weakness to Himself.

How blessed is the result! First all are brought to rest. Then He takes the very things which were the witness of their weakness, and brings earth's weakness into touch with heaven's fulness, with the result the people were not only fed but filled, and there remained twelve baskets full." His grace can meet our need, but our need will never exhaust His grace.

4. THE STORMY SEA — Matthew 14:22-36.

Now the scene changes and we are permitted to see the Lord in an entirely new position, setting forth fresh truths. In the former scene He was in "a desert place apart" (13); here He is in "a mountain apart" (23). There we learn in a picture that Christ is entirely outside the course of this world, here we learn that He has entered upon a new world. The mountain position speaks to us of the place He has taken on high. Moreover we learn that though He is on high His heart of love is still occupied with His people who are passing through this world, for we read, "He went up . . . to pray." In the place of glory He intercedes for His people. And what of His people for whom He intercedes? They are in a scene of ever increasing darkness, for we read, "the evening was come" (23); they are surrounded by a world that is opposed, for they are "in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves," and the power of Satan is against them — "the wind was contrary" (24).

They are not left, however, to struggle alone with their difficulties as if sufficient for these things. The Lord comes to His people, as we read, "in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them." In the desert it was the needy people who came to Him, for as we have seen "they followed Him." Today His direct dealings with this world are over, and He is concerned with His people alone. Here He not only comes to His people, but He comes in a way that was new and strange to the disciples. He came "walking on the sea." They had known Him as the One who had been with them in the boat and slept upon the sea. And beautiful indeed it was to see Him, as the dependent Man amongst men, in such perfect confidence in the Father's love that He can sleep in the storm on the sea; but this occasioned no fear. Now, however, they see a Man walking on the sea in the storm, and they are troubled and cried out with fear.

They had known Him as the One who was with them in the storm, now they see Him as beyond all weariness and above all storms. Such is His position to-day. Not only is He apart from the world, He is above the world, and beyond the reach of its storms. The storm of Calvary has spent itself. Death hath no more dominion over Him. He walks upon the waves.

If, however, they have to learn Christ in a new way, they will also find that It is the same Jesus. The Jesus who as the lowly One had slept on the sea, is the same Jesus who, as the mighty One, can walk upon the sea. Thus He can say to His disciples, "It is I; be not afraid."

Thus the Lord comes to His own — His Jewish disciples — who had journeyed with Him in His pathway here. Moreover, if He comes, it is to attract them to Himself outside of the Jewish system. They were in the ship, and a ship is a human device to keep people afloat on an element otherwise impossible to them. Such was the Jewish system with which the disciples of the Lord were connected; and such is every human system that man devises after the pattern of the Jewish system — devices to maintain people religiously without intimate contact with Christ. The Lord thus presents Himself as the One who is interceding for His people — occupied wholly with them; who is above all storms — superior to every power, and as the One who is outside every device to sustain man in this world. Moreover if He presents Himself to His people it is to attract them to Himself in the outside place. If, however we are to be drawn outside the systems of men it can only be as having Christ Himself before our souls as our one Object, and as having Christ's word as our sole authority. This is very blessedly set forth in Peter. He seems to say, "If I am to leave the ship, if I am to walk on the water, it must be Thyself as my Object, and Thy word as my authority" — "Lord if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water." He has found an Object that attracts his heart, and he receives a word that gives him authority, for the Lord says "Come." This beautiful picture thus sets forth the truth of the Church, unfolded to believers after the Lord had taken His place on high, by which Christ's Assembly is separated from a worldly religious system to gather to Christ as the new centre. This truth is summed up for us in the Epistle to the Hebrews where we are exhorted "to go forth unto Him without the Camp."

How slow we are to realize that Christianity presents a company of believers gathered together with Christ as their centre, their bond, their all. The natural man can understand a company of people bound together by articles of religion, and organized by some central and visible authority, but nature cannot conceive of a company of people held together in unity without any humanly devised articles of religion, without any visible human authority, — held together, guided, and sustained in the face of all opposition by an unseen Head. To the natural man this is as impossible as walking on the water. The moment Peter stepped upon the water he was in a position in which he no longer had the aid of the ship to sustain him, and in which nature was of no avail. Not all the concentrated energies of man, nor all the wisdom of the ages would enable a man to walk upon the water. The one who takes such a position is wholly and altogether dependent upon Christ. We can float upon the water in a boat, but we cannot walk upon the water without Christ.

Further we see the motive that led Peter to leave the ship and walk upon the sea. It was, as we read, "to go to Jesus." His object was not simply to get away from the ship, still less to walk on the water, but definitely and only "to go to Jesus." He did not leave the ship because it was "tossed with waves," or because of any troubles in the ship. The Lord was outside the ship, and love would fain be in His company, and faith realized, that if the Lord gave the word to come to Him, the Lord would be able to sustain the one who answered to His word.

How blessedly the principles that mark the path of separation are summed up for us in verse 29. In obedience to Christ's word, "Come," Peter came down out of the ship. In faith "he walked on the water." In affection "he walked on the water to go to Jesus." If in our day we take a place of separation outside the religious systems formed by sincere men after the pattern of Judaism, we shall find that it is a path that demands unswerving obedience to the Word; that calls for faith in Christ, and affection for Christ.

Moreover there are other lessons for Peter, and for ourselves through Peter, in what follows. Lessons that can only be learnt in the outside place. Peter has faith to leave the ship "to go to Jesus," but is Peter's faith sufficient to face a storm? And if Peter fails and begins to sink is the Lord who was able to sustain Peter when walking on the sea, willing to save Peter when sinking in the sea?

Peter has to learn, and we with him, that in the outside place everything depends upon the Lord, and directly the eye is off the Lord we begin to sink in the presence of the storm. Thus it comes to pass Peter is put to the test in order to learn his own weakness and the Lord's sufficiency. To learn these wholesome lessons, Peter has to face the storm. The wind grows "boisterous," the waves run high, and when Peter "saw the wind boisterous" he began to sink. Looking upon Jesus he walked upon the water; looking upon the storm he sinks in the water. Peter has to learn that if Jesus is the One who walks on the water and says "Come," He is the only One who can sustain us when we do come. It was as impossible for Peter to walk on the water in a calm as in a storm. It was as easy for the Lord to sustain Peter in the storm as in the calm.

Thus we learn our weakness: but in doing so we learn Christ's sufficiency. In sinking Peter cried to the Lord to save him, and immediately the hand of the Lord is stretched out to save. If the love of the Lord attracts to Himself in the outside place. the hand of the Lord can sustain in spite of every storm. Nevertheless if His gracious hand is ready to save us from sinking, He may have to rebuke our unbelief.

Those in the ship might have thought it enthusiastic madness on the part of Peter to leave the ship and attempt to do what no man had ever done before. They might condemn him for doing something contrary to nature and reason, and congratulate themselves for not sinking like Peter or being rebuked like Peter. Yet be it remembered that if they did not sink in the water like Peter, neither did they walk on the water like Peter; and if they did not suffer the rebuke of the Lord's words, neither did they get the support of the Lord's hand. The closing verses of the chapter, in which the Lord returns to the ship with Peter, present a picture of the day that is yet to come when the Lord will return to earth with His saints, and renew His links with Israel. Then indeed the storms of earth will be over and peace at last will come to the world. Jesus, who was once rejected, will be owned as the Son of God and millennial blessing will be introduced.

S. The Path of Life.

The Path of Life.

Psalms 16:1-11.

Hamilton Smith.

(Extracted from Scripture Truth Vol. 42, 1965-7, pages 230-4) In the New Testament both the apostle Paul and the apostle Peter, speaking by the Holy Spirit, use quotations from Psalms 16:1-11, as being the language of the Lord Jesus (see Acts 2:25-28; Hebrews 2:13). We thus know, beyond all question, that in this beautiful Psalm we hear the voice of Jesus telling us of the life that He lived when passing through this world. It is this that makes the Psalm so precious to the believer.

How many and varied are the glories of Christ! Other Scriptures present His glory as a Divine Person — the Son of God, making God known in all His moral attributes. Here, however, Christ is viewed in His perfection as a Man, though never ceasing to be God, because He has become Man.

Furthermore, as the Son of Man, Christ is presented in different connections. We may think of Him, with great delight, as the One who "went about doing good, healing all that were oppressed of the devil;" feeding the hungry; clothing the naked; teaching and preaching the Kingdom of God. Then we can contemplate Him doing that mighty work on the cross, and, having learnt what He has done for us in the past, we can look up and see Him "crowned with glory and honour" — the present Object for our souls as the One who is living for us and soon coming for us. Good and needful for our souls to contemplate Christ in these varied glories; but they are not the theme of this Psalm. It does not present Christ doing a work for us on the cross, nor as our Object in the glory. Neither does it speak of His outward life or perfection before men. It presents the inner life lived by Christ under the eye of God when passing through this world as the perfect Man. It marks out "the path of life" through a world of death, that leads to "fulness of joy" in the presence of God. A path leads from one place to another. It has been pointed out that there was no path in the Garden of Eden, and there will be no path in the Paradise of God. When we reach the rest that remaineth we shall need no path to leave that home of bliss, for we shall "go no more out". The path is through this fallen world where none can rest nor remain. The unbeliever treads a path that ends in death. But there is "the path of life" that leads to pleasures for evermore, that has been marked out by Jesus, Who, in taking this path has left a perfect example of the inner life lived before God that becomes His people. Good for us, then, to listen to the voice of Jesus and thus learn the blessedness of a life lived before God, and seek by grace, in our measure to follow in the path that He has marked out.

Firstly (verses 1, 2) we learn that this life is one of perfect dependence upon God as we hear the Lord say, "Preserve me, O God." As a Divine Person He could have preserved Himself, but this would have been no pattern for us. He did not preserve Himself, nor avail Himself of the aid of

twelve legions of angels. He walked through this world with all its trials in entire dependence upon God, as became the position He had taken as Man. Moreover, the One on Whom He depended was One in Whom He had perfect confidence, for He can say, "In Thee do I put my trust." In human affairs we may be dependent upon one in whom we have little confidence. In God we have One on Whom we can depend by casting all our care upon Him, and can do so with perfect confidence knowing that He careth for us (1 Peter 5:7). The apostle Paul, following the Lord's example, expresses his dependence, when he says, in the midst of all the trials he had to face, the Lord "will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom", and shows his confidence in the Lord, when he adds "The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work" (2 Timothy 4:18).

Further, this life of dependence on God, and confidence in God, was marked by subjection to God, for the Lord can say, "Thou art my Lord." Having taken the form of a servant, and being found in fashion as a man, "He humbled himself and became obedient" (Php 2:7-8). Coming into the world He could say, "I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me": going out of the world, we hear Him say, "Not my will, but thine be done" (Hebrews 10:9; John 5:34; Luke 22:42). Ever seeking the Father's will, He can say, "I do always those things that please Him" (John 8:29). With the perfect example of the Lord before us we may well make the desire of the apostle our prayer, when he says, may God "make you perfect in every good work to do His will working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight" (Hebrews 13:21).

Secondly (verses 3, 4), we see in the Lord Jesus, a Man whose delight was in the saints — the excellent of the earth. The benefits of His goodness — manifested in dependence, confidence and subjection — are for the saints in whom He delights. We do well to ask ourselves, as God looks down into our hearts, Who is it that He sees we delight in? We may make a fair profession before one another, and yet too often, in our hearts which God sees, we may be "having men's persons In admiration because of advantage", and thus set a higher value on riches and social position than on spirituality and the lowly graces of the One who was "meek and lowly in heart". With the Lord, His delight is in "the excellent" — those marked by the moral excellencies of God, even though they be weak, and base, and despised in the eyes of the world (1 Corinthians 1:26-28). Good for us to heed the word that exhorts us "Have the same respect one for another, not minding high things, but going along with the lowly" (Romans 12:16, N.T.), and thus, like the Lord, delight in "the excellent ".

Moreover, with a heart filled with fidelity to Jehovah, and delight in the saints, the Lord was wholly separate from those who were multiplying sorrows to themselves by hastening after some other object than Jehovah. Has this no warning voice for believers? We do well to remember the words with which the apostle John closes his epistle. Having reminded us that "the whole world lieth in the wicked one", he gives the warning word, "Little children keep yourselves from idols." Let us beware of allowing our hearts to be governed by any object that would come in between our souls and God.

Thirdly (verses 5, 6) in contrast to those who hasten after some worldly object for the gratification of the flesh the Lord can say, "Jehovah is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup." The inheritance is the lasting portion of the believer to which we are going on; the cup speaks of the experience of which we taste in passing through the circumstances of life on the way to the inheritance. The Lord, as He passed through this world, looked on to the joy that was set before

Him and thus experienced the sustaining grace of Jehovah amidst all the circumstances of life, however trying and sorrowful. He did not look for support and comfort from those around Him, but found His support in the unchanging love of the Father. Thus He was maintained, and could say as He passed through this world, "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places;" and, as He looked to the end of the path, He can add, "Yea, I have a goodly heritage."

Fourthly (verse 7), in this path of life, the Lord, as the perfect Man was counselled and instructed by Jehovah. In another passage, the Lord, speaking as the Servant, can say of Jehovah, "He wakeneth mine ear to hear as the instructed" (Isaiah 1:4, N.T.). The Lord draws a distinction between the counsel of God and the instruction. He can say, "the LORD hath given me counsel," but "My reins also instruct Me." The counsel speaks of all that God has purposed, made known in His word. To learn the counsel of God we need to have the opened ear to hear as learners, or as those who are "instructed". For the knowledge of His counsel we need "every Scripture", which we know is "given by inspiration of God, and is profitable . . . that the man of God may be perfect . . . throughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The reins speak of the secret thoughts that govern our practical lives. When these thoughts are formed by the counsel of God, and set free from all outward influences, as suggested by the quiet of the night seasons, we shall be instructed as to the path of life through this world. In Christ all was perfect. His thoughts were entirely governed by the word of God, and free from every influence of the world around.

Fifthly (verse 8), the word of God will ever lead to God, Himself. So Christ, as a Man on earth, can say, "I have set the

Chapter 75

S. The Pattern of the House.

The Pattern of the House.

Ezekiel 43:10-12;Acts 2:1-47.

Hamilton Smith.

Address given at Aberdeen, Wednesday Evening, September 13th, 1922.

While we have been together reference has been made to that wonderful scripture, Ephesians 5:1-33 which tells us that "Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church." From this scripture we rightly judge that to the heart of Christ the Church is the most precious thing on earth today.

Now I propose to speak on one aspect of the Church of God. We know, do we not? that the Church is presented in two great aspects in the New Testament. First, as the body of Christ, then, under another figure, as the House of God. When we speak of the Church as the body of Christ we think of all the Christians on earth formed into one body by the Holy Spirit and united to Christ as the Head in heaven; but when we speak of the Church as the House of God, we think of all believers united together by the Holy Spirit to form the dwelling place of God upon earth. In other words, if we think of the Church as the body of Christ, we think more especially of the Church in its heavenly aspect, because it is obvious that if we are united to the Head in heaven, we belong to the place where the Head is. But when we speak of the Church as the House of God, we think of the Church in its earthly aspect as the dwelling place of God on earth, and therefore as a witness of God to the world. It is this latter aspect of the Church that I want to refer to this evening, namely, the House of God. As the truth of the House of God may be new to some here, I will first refer to two scriptures which definitely show that God has His House on earth to-day. Let me read one verse; Ephesians 2:22, "In whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit." Then read 1 Timothy 3:14-15 : "These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the House of God." Then the Apostle distinctly says that the House of God "is the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." I simply refer to these two scriptures to prove the great fact that God has His House upon earth today.

Now, brethren, I would just remind you of a historical fact which is somewhat remarkable. Most here will remember, how that in the last century, about 1825, God in His grace revived the great truth of the Church, and at that time the truth that was first apprehended was the Church in the aspect of the body of Christ. It is striking that it was not until some years later that the truth of the Church as the House of God was generally apprehended or taught. It was only in the year 1860 that Mr. Darby published his tract, "The House of God; the Body of Christ," and in 1867 his second tract, "The Church — The House and the Body," appeared. The importance of this lies in the fact that the Church as the House of God is the last great truth that has been revived by God. And

mark you, dear friends, the truth that is last revived is the truth that we first let go in a day of departure, and hence I think we shall agree that this truth of the Church as the House of God is of the first importance, and therefore I venture to bring it before you in a simple and practical way.

Now before I go further, I will ask you to turn to Ezekiel 43:10-12 : "Thou son of man, show the House to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities: and let them measure the pattern. And if they be ashamed of all that they have done, show them the form of the House, and the fashion thereof, and the goings out thereof, and the comings in thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the laws thereof: and write it in their sight, that they may keep the whole form thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and do them. This is the law of the House."

Now we all know that Ezekiel was the prophet of the Captivity; he was speaking to the people of Israel when they were held in captivity because of their iniquities, and God gave Ezekiel a magnificent vision of the House of God, and He says as it were, to Ezekiel, "You show the people this vision of the House so that they may see how far they have departed from My thought." There are two things the prophet was told to do; first he was to show them "the pattern of the House" then he goes on to say in substance a second thing "If," and you will please mark that If — "if these people are ashamed of the way they have departed from the pattern, you may go on and show them the law of the House." There are then two things there is (1) the pattern of the House, and (2) there is the law of the House.

I may point to a magnificent building, and you may admire its design and you may say to me, "Yes, I see the pattern, but tell me on what principle is the house governed?" Now, God has His House, and He has His principles for the administration of His House, and mark this, we cannot apply the law of God’s House to a house that man has designed; you can only apply God’s law to God’s pattern; you cannot have a pattern of your own, and then try to work that pattern on God’s principles. Hence, unless the people repented, the prophet had nothing more to tell them; but if they did repent, if they owned that they had departed from the pattern, he could tell them the law of the House.

Coming now to New Testament times we find that God has still His House upon earth. From the verses I read you, the one in Ephesians and the other in Timothy, it is very evident that God’s House to-day is not formed of material stones it is a House formed of living stones, of believers and moreover God has given us the pattern of His House, as well as the law — the principle — on which His House is administered. Now in order to bring before you the immense importance of this great truth, let me briefly show you what a large place the House of God has in the New Testament. For instance, in the Acts we see the pattern exemplified in a practical way. In 1st Timothy we find the pattern of the House in a doctrinal way. Then in 1 and 2 Corinthians we have the law of the House, or, the divine principles for the administration of the House, such as association, fellowship, holiness, liberty, love, edification, and separation. Then again, in the Epistles to the seven Churches in Revelation 21:1-29 and Revelation 3:1-22, we get the prophetic history of the Church as the House of God in the responsibility of men, with the result it has been ruined. Then coming back to 2 Timothy, we get instruction how to walk in a day of ruin, and finally, in Revelation 21:1-27, in the vision of that magnificent city, we have presented to us symbolically, the House of God in millennial display. From these scriptures you will see that a very large part of

the New Testament is taken up with instructions as to the Assembly, the Church of God, viewed as the House of God.

Having made these preliminary remarks, I will ask you to turn to Acts 2:1-47, in order to present a few definite facts that will bring before us the pattern of God's House in a practical way. As we look abroad today, we see Christendom broken up into innumerable sects, each having a special form of Church government, holding distinguishing creeds and conducting their services according to special forms and ceremonies. We see, too, vast numbers of societies and organisations for sending out missionaries, and generally conducting religious work, and in them all we see devoted men for whom we can truly thank God.

But, beloved brethren, as we look abroad at Christendom, as we see all this vast machinery for carrying on the service of God, we may well ask ourselves, Is this what God intended? Is all this religious machinery God's way of carrying on His work? Is it according to the pattern? This surely, is a proper question to ask, and in order to answer this question we must go back to the Book, for the simple reason that it is not possible in a day of ruin and departure from the truth, to look abroad on this earth and see any concrete illustration of the House of God.

Therefore in order to get a true conception of the House of God — and here we are faced with a difficulty — we must get it in an abstract way. Abstracting our minds from all that we see around, we must seek to get before us the pattern of the house of God as presented in Scripture, going back to Pentecostal days. I think we shall get some true thought of the pattern of the House in a practical way, and, as I have said, we must have the pattern before we can talk of the law of the House. In the opening chapter of the Acts we are faced with three great facts. First of all, redemption is accomplished. In Acts 1:3, we read, "To whom also He showed Himself alive after His passion." His sufferings then were over — redemption was accomplished. That was one great fact. Two other facts follow — the Lord Jesus Christ is received up into glory the Holy Spirit is received upon earth. The Church could have no existence apart from the accomplishment of these three stupendous facts. Redemption must be accomplished to remove everything that would hinder God having His Church; then the Lord Jesus Christ must take His place in glory, and the Holy Spirit must come down to earth.

Now, dear friends, I want for just one brief moment to press those two latter stupendous facts, because every essential truth of Christianity hangs upon them. To-day there is a Man, a real Man, in the glory, and there is a Divine Person on earth. When I say there is a Man in the glory you must not for a moment think that I am for, getting that the Man, the Lord Jesus Christ in the glory, is "over all God blessed for ever;" He is that, but still the way Scripture presents the truth is, that He has gone back to the glory as a Man.

Stephen looked up and saw the Son of Man at the right hand of God.

Then, on the other hand, there is a Divine Person on the earth, and mark you, the One that has come down from the glory has come to represent Christ in you and me. That is to say the Lord Jesus Christ has taken a place in the glory as Lord, and the Holy Spirit has come down to make the Lord known in our hearts, and the Person that has come down is as great as the Person that has gone up — hence He is perfectly adequate, and perfectly competent, to take of His things and show them to you and me.

Well, the Holy Spirit comes down, and in Acts 2:1-47, He descends upon the hundred and twenty disciples gathered together. He doesn't come upon the twelve simply, but He comes upon the hundred and twenty. Before that day, you will remember according to that word in John 11:52 the children of God had been scattered abroad, but now, at this moment when the Holy Spirit came, they were gathered together in one, and not only that, but the Holy Spirit indwelt them — they were sealed by the Spirit — and He was with them, and the result was that the House of God came into existence in a new way. The people of God formed the dwelling place of God on earth.

Now I want to present to you in a simple way seven facts in this chapter that I think will give us an idea of the pattern of God's House. If we get the pattern of God's House into our souls, we shall be able to see whether or not we have departed from it. Now the first great mark of God's House must of necessity be that it is the place where God dwells. Hence the first great thing that comes before us in this chapter is the presence, power, and control of the Holy Spirit. Now you will note how the instant the Holy Spirit comes, everything that these disciples do is in the power, and under the control, of the Holy Spirit. They proclaim the glad tidings, but it was, "As the Spirit gave them utterance." In Acts 4:8, we read, "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers," etc., that is to say, when opposition arose, it was met in the power of the Holy Spirit. Then if we pass on we find in Acts 6:1-15 a question arises as to the temporal needs of the saints, and immediately men are chosen to meet this difficulty who are "full of the Holy Ghost." Then in the end of that chapter Stephen meets opposition, in the power of the Spirit. In the end of Acts 7:1-60, Stephen endures persecution, but he does it in the power of the Spirit — as we read, "He, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God." In the mighty power of the Holy Spirit he was able to face martyrdom. Passing on to Acts 8:29, we find Philip, the evangelist, receives his instructions from the Spirit, and so we find, if we follow on chapter after chapter, that the Holy Spirit is present in the House of God to take entire control.

Now, beloved brethren, I think we may well pause for one moment to ask ourselves this question, Have we not in great measure lost the sense of the reality of the presence of the Holy Spirit? What was the origin of the ruin of Christendom? Was it not the loss of all sense of the presence of the Holy Spirit? The outstanding sin of Christendom is that it has so largely set aside and ignored the Holy Spirit. By its religious organisations and religious machinery it has, to a large extent, shut out the Holy Spirit. The presence and control of the Spirit is then the first great mark of the House of God, and apprehending this, we shall be able to measure how great has been the departure from its pattern.

Before passing on, let me say that if the presence of the Holy Spirit is the first great outstanding feature in the House of God, it must involve that where the Holy Spirit is there can be no room for the flesh. Hence you will see in these early chapters of the Acts, that though the flesh seeks to intrude, yet, again and again, the flesh is dealt with. In the case of Ananias and Sapphira religious reputation is sought by lying, and is dealt with by the Holy Spirit; then in Acts 6:1-15, the flesh murmurs and is dealt with by the Spirit. Where the Holy Spirit is, the flesh must be excluded. Oh! brethren, looking around, we see, together with the loss of all sense of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit there is the allowance of the flesh in almost every form. We have practically said that the Holy Spirit is not able, that He is incompetent to move souls, and we have resorted to all kinds of fleshly methods to try to reach and to touch people. By music, and choirs, and pathetic

solos, and other fleshly methods the Holy Spirit has been ignored, forgetting that only by the Holy Spirit can souls be reached, and that He is adequate to meet every possible emergency that can arise in the House of God.

Let me then repeat that the first great mark of the House of God is the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit. May God give us to see how far we have departed from the pattern, and may He bring us back to it. The second great fact that comes out in this chapter is that the House of God is the place where the disposition of God towards men is made known. This is one great leading thought in the House of God. Hence, immediately the House of God is formed, men begin to hear, in all their different languages, the wonderful works of God. We get some of these wonderful works brought out in verses 22-36, how that God was with the Lord Jesus Christ; how He delivered Him up, how He was crucified, how He was raised from the dead, how He was received up into glory; and then mark what Peter says in verse 38: "Repent, and be baptised everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." I do not think we always stop to think what a remarkable verse that is. Peter is speaking to the people who had spat in the face of their Messiah, they had nailed Him to the cross; they had crowned Him with a crown of thorns; they said, "Away with Him, not this Man, but Barabbas." But the marvellous thing is that immediately the House of God is formed there goes out from the House of God this wonderful message which tells to the world the disposition of God to those very people who had cast out His Son. This is what Peter tells them — in spite of what they had done; in spite of the fact that they had rejected the Messiah and spat in His face and crowned Him with a crown of thorns, such was the heart of God, that He can say, "Repent, and be baptised everyone of you" — not a single exception — "in the name of Jesus Christ," and you will receive the remission of your sins, and the greatest possible gift — "the gift of the Holy Ghost." Now that was the magnificent message that went out from the House of God.

Hence you will see another great feature of the House of God is that it is not only the place where God dwells, but it is the place where God is made known. Brethren, if we give up the gospel, we shall depart from the pattern of the House. And so you will find in chapter after chapter of this wonderful book that the gospel is told out, and the fact of the gospel being given up so much today in Christendom only shows how great the departure has been from the pattern.

Let me add in connection with making known the gospel, that not only is the House of God the place where God is witnessed to, but it is the place where God is witnessed to by God’s witnesses. That is to say in the House of God, God chooses to take up whom He likes to do His work; and, as a matter of fact, He takes up very often very simple people, as we read, in 1 Corinthians 1:26, "Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen; yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence." That is to say that God will have a wonderful witness going forth from His House, but He will have that witness carried out by His own witnesses, and His witnesses are for the most part the poor and feeble of this world. So in Acts 2:1-47 we read, "Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans?" Galileans, of course, were the simple country folk — the peasantry — and Peter "an unlearned and ignorant man" was their leader, and for the most part the witnesses of God have been all

through the ages the simple and poor of this world. God on occasions may take up a rich man, or a noble man, for some special work, but generally, as of old, so to-day, God’s witnesses are chosen from the despised of this world.

Passing on, we have in verse 41 a third fact. The House of God was formed by a people who were separate from this world. It says, "Then they that gladly received his word, were baptised: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." They were a separate company. Baptism, as we all know, presents the idea of separation. There was in that day, and there is in this day, the great world system, dominated by the power of evil and the will of men, but on the other hand there was a new circle formed by God, and in that circle the Holy Spirit dwelt. Dominated by the Holy Spirit, and the flesh excluded, there was a circle of life and light and blessing. The converts were separated from this world’s circle, and were brought into the Christian circle by baptism — the figure of death. They said in substance, "We are dead to that world in which we once lived, we have left it in order that we might come into that new circle of life and love where God dwells." Now, dear friends, look around at Christendom, and what a sight we see! We see the world and Christians so mixed up that you cannot tell the difference. Does this not show how great has been the departure from the pattern of the house of God? A fourth fact is in verse 42: "They continued steadfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine," or the Apostles’ teaching. The House of God is not a place where we are left in ignorance to follow our own way, and do the best we can; no, it is the place of divine teaching. For us today we have the Apostles’ doctrine enshrined in the epistles. In Acts 2:1-47, it was limited to what was then known; to-day, we have the whole revealed mind of God in the Scriptures, and Paul’s doctrine, which has come out since the day of Pentecost, is most important. The fact that the Apostles’ doctrine is so lightly set aside today only marks a further stage in the downward course of departure from the pattern. Brethren we want to get back to the Word, and have our thoughts formed by the Apostles’ teaching. The fifth fact is, they continued in "fellowship." Fellowship, we know from 1 Corinthians 1:9, is the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord — not fellowship with His Son, but fellowship of His Son. Fellowship is a very simple thought; it means that we participate in common, and that involves a bond which binds us together. We participate in common in the dominion and administration of the Lord Jesus Christ, we own one Lord, He is the bond of our fellowship, and, beloved brethren, we are responsible to be true to that fellowship. The sixth fact is "they continued . . . in the breaking of bread." In the breaking of bread we formally commit ourselves to fellowship in the death of Christ. "The bread which we break is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" It is something we do ourselves. Baptism is the act of another. We could not baptise ourselves. But when we take the Lord’s Supper, it is something we do. We formally commit ourselves to the death of Christ, and that means, beloved brethren, a very great deal. It surely means that now we are responsible to allow nothing that is contrary to Christ’s death, that we are not to go on with that for which, and to which, Christ has died. Alas! in this respect, how great has been the departure from the pattern. The seventh fact is, "They continued . . . in prayers." Here then is the last great mark of the House of God. It is marked by being a place of prayer. As we read in the Old Testament the House of God should be the place of prayer for all nations, so, too, when you come to the doctrine in the Epistle to Timothy we see a very, great deal is made of prayer. "I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands." It is the place where we can get in touch with God on behalf of men in a perishing world around us. And being the place of prayer, it is the place where we express our dependence upon God.

Here then we have seven marks of the House of God — IT IS THE PLACE WHERE THE HOLY SPIRIT DWELLS and WHERE HIS PRESENCE IS KNOWN.

IT IS THE PLACE FROM WHICH THE GOSPEL GOES OUT. It is the House of God that sets forth the disposition of God to this poor world. It is then not only the place where the Holy Spirit dwells, where the Gospel is told out, but it tells of SEPARATION FROM THE WORLD. It is the place too, where we have DIVINE LIGHT, CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP EXPRESSED IN THE BREAKING OF BREAD and in PRAYERS.

Now I am not proposing anything that is not possible today. We are in the midst of ruin; everything is broken up, but still we have the pattern of God's House, and if I once see the pattern, there are two things before my soul; first, I must refuse everything that is not according to the pattern, and, secondly, I am responsible to walk according to the pattern.

One more remark before I close. In taking you back to Pentecost it is needful to sound a warning note, because we hear a very great deal today of going back to Pentecost, but what people mean, alas! is this, they want to make something of themselves by getting back to the outward power of Pentecost; they would like to get back to tongues and healing and miracles. I have no such thought. But what I do say is this — that while I have no thought of trying to go back to the outward power of Pentecost, yet I would seek to get back to the divine principles of Pentecost, and you will see that all I have brought before you this evening is quite possible today. The Holy Spirit is still here; the gospel can still be preached; it is still possible to be separate from this world; we still have the Apostles' teaching; it is still possible to walk in fellowship, to break bread, and to pray. There is not a single mark of the House of God, that I have brought before you, that is not possible to be walking in the power and blessing of. Hence we can go back to Pentecost for divine principles, but I do not go back for outward power. Do not let us presume to reconstruct anything, or set up to be a pattern of the house. We shall break down if we do. All we have to do is in all simplicity to seek to walk in accordance with the principles of that House, and, brethren, I say again, I don't go back to Pentecost simply for outward power.

If I want power — and I do want power — I say do not go back to Pentecost, but on to glory, and, beloved brethren, I delight to look on and see the power is coming. A day of display is coming. There will be power and there will be display, but you must look on for that. I know there is a tendency to look back and say that the days that are gone were the best days. Sometimes it is said the times of the early brethren were the best days; and I have no doubt they were saying what wonderful days they had in the days of Wesley and Whitefield; and I am sure they again would talk of the days of Samuel Rutherford and the Covenanters; and if you had lived in Aberdeen and got in touch with Samuel Rutherford, he might have said, "Ah! if you had only lived a hundred years ago in the days of Luther;" and Luther was looking back to the days of St. Augustine; and he again was looking back to the days of the Apostles; and so they were all looking back, and all looking the wrong way.

It may be we live in a day of great failure, we are a feeble folk, but the best days are coming; they are not behind; they are on before. Look on. The glory of the latter house shall be greater than the glory of the former. In spite of all the breakdown, and all the ruin and all the weakness, the best times are coming, and in that great city — the holy City, New Jerusalem — I see the glory and power and display, and the weakness and the failure will have gone for ever, for the former things

are passed away, and I see the purposes of God fulfilled in spite of the failure of man, so that I repeat, if we want power and glory, we must look on, and if we want divine principles to guide us in the present moment we must look back. May the Lord give us a deeper sense of the pattern of the House according to His own mind, and may that pattern be transferred from Scripture to our hearts and minds so that we may seek to walk and live according to the principles and pattern of God’s House!

S. The Pleasure of the Lord.

The Pleasure of the Lord.

"Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief: Thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, He shall see his seed, He shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand " (Isaiah 53:10).

Hamilton Smith (Extracted from Scripture Truth Vol. 42, 1965-7, pages 194-9)

Three great truths stand out clearly in the above words of the prophet Isaiah. First, it is revealed that God has His pleasure; secondly, we are told that the pleasure of the LORD is going to prosper; thirdly, we learn, that the pleasure of the LORD will prosper in the hand of one Person — the Lord Jesus Christ. From the beginning of the world's history, God has had His pleasure, but it has not prospered in the hands of men. There have been men of God, who, on occasions, have done great deeds, and in particular acts have wrought the will of God; yet it could not be said that the pleasure of the LORD had prospered throughout the ages. All things were created for God's pleasure (Revelation 4:11); but sin marred the fair creation. In Noah God established government to restrain the evil of the world; but at once God's pleasure is set aside, for the one who was set to govern others failed to govern himself. The law was given to regulate man's conduct toward God and his neighbour, to secure the blessing of man on the earth; but at the outset man breaks the law with the golden calf. God establishes a priestly order to intercede with Himself on behalf of guilty man; at once the priest fails by offering false incense. God institutes royalty, and the kings lead the people into idolatry. God sends prophets to recall the people to Himself, and they stone the prophets. He places the government of the world in the hands of the Gentiles, and they use their power to exalt themselves. At last God sends His Son, and the Kings of the earth and the rulers of the Jews take counsel together against the LORD and His anointed. They nail the Messiah to the Cross. Thus it becomes manifest that the pleasure of the LORD has not prospered in the hands of men. Nevertheless the words of the prophet remain in all their inspired force; the pleasure of the LORD is going to prosper, but it will be in the hands of one Man, CHRIST.

Fixing then our gaze upon Christ we shall see, first, that the pleasure of God for man is set forth in absolute perfection in Christ: secondly, we shall learn that the pleasure of God is secured by Christ. THE PLEASURE OF GOD SET FORTH IN CHRIST To see the pleasure of God set forth in Christ, we need, first of all, to look back, and " consider Him" where He was in the midst of a world of sinners; then to look stedfastly on Jesus where He is in the glory of God.

Looking back at His wonderful pathway through this world we see the Lord Jesus, a Man amongst men, in whom God was well pleased. We hear Him say, "I do always those things that please Him" (John 8:29). In the midst of a world of sinners, who but one who is a Divine Person as well as perfect Man could utter such words? Others might say, " We desire to do the things that please God," but only the Son could say, "I do always those things that please Him." The One who speaks thus must be either the Son of God, or an impostor. This the Jews clearly understood; but,

alas, refusing to own Him as a Divine Person, they are compelled to charge Him with being an impostor, for they say, "Thou hast a devil," and "then took they up stones to stone Him."

Faith, however, delights to own His glory, and see in Him "the Word become flesh," "the glory as of the Only begotten of the Father". Tracing His footsteps on earth as we see at last a Man according to the pleasure of the LORD. As one has said, " Men seek their own glory. He sought His Father's alone. Men do their own will; His Father's will was His only business.... Think of One who for three and thirty years of His sojourn on earth never did one thing to serve Himself, spare Himself, exalt Himself, but for every moment of His life was and did spoke and thought, and felt, exactly as God would have Him."

If then this blessed Person could truly say, "I do always those things that please Him," the Father could, with great delight, justify such words, for after those thirty years in private at Nazareth, the heavens open over Him, and the voice of the Father is heard saying, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." And again, when the three and a half years of His public life draw to a close, we hear the Father's voice declaring on the Mount, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

Thus at last we see on earth One who is altogether lovely and wholly for the pleasure of God. Moreover, as we look at Christ in His moral perfections, we see all that God desires to be set forth in a Man, and nothing short of His perfection will meet the pleasure of God for man. It is God's good pleasure to have a great company of people morally like Christ. But we not only look back to see the moral perfection of Christ shining out in the midst of sinful men, in a world of sorrow and death, but we look up and see Jesus crowned with glory and honour in that scene where all tears are wiped away, where "there will be no more death neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain", and, as with Stephen we look up through the opened heavens, and see "the glory of God and Jesus" at the right hand of God, we see that it is the pleasure of God to have us with Him.

Thus as we look at Jesus, we see the pleasure of God set forth in Him. We see that it is God's pleasure to have a great company of people saved from the wreck and ruin of this fallen world to be like Christ in His moral perfection as set forth in His path down here, and to be with Christ where He is in that home of light and love. THE PLEASURE OF GOD SECURED BY CHRIST

Alas! this wonderful presentation of the pleasure of God in Christ made manifest the true condition of man under the power of sin Satan, and death. The natural man desires to be left alone to go his own way, do his own will, and gratify his lusts. Naturally we prefer the pleasures of sin to the pleasure of God. The light of the presence of Christ only proved that men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. The light was too strong for sinful men, and so they rejected Christ, nailed Him to the Cross, and put out the light of the world.

Thus, as we look upon Christ in all His moral perfection — His holiness, love, grace, gentleness, patience, meekness, and lowliness — every trait of His lovely character, every word that fell from His lips, every act and every step in His perfect path, only convicts us of being exactly the opposite. How then is it possible for God's pleasure to be secured by having a people who are morally like Christ, and suited to be with Christ in glory?

There is only one answer to this great question. The pleasure of God for man can only be secured by the death of the One who is altogether for His pleasure. This, indeed, was realised by the prophet Isaiah, for he says, "Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief." One has said that "He who has no pleasure in the death of the wicked was pleased to put His righteous Servant to grief — not, of course, because the death of agony was a pleasure to look upon, but as a means to the fulfilment of a great purpose". Thus immediately that great sacrifice is accomplished, the pleasure of the LORD begins to prosper. "When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin," and not till then, the pleasure of the LORD shall begin to prosper. Before God could secure, out of a world of sinners, a people made like to Christ for His pleasure, God's holiness had to be met and our sins removed. This great work was done when His soul was made an offering for sin, and "He was wounded for our transgressions". So, in the New Testament, we see the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy, and we read. He "offered Himself without spot to God" to meet the holiness of God; and of believers it is written, " He was delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification." This great work being foreseen by the prophet, he tells us the results that will follow. He says, "When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed. For the natural man death would cut off all hope of a seed, but by death this blessed Man secures a seed. So we hear the Lord, Himself, saying, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12:24). Thus He secures His seed - a spiritual seed — composed of a great host of the redeemed gathered out of all nations, who at last will sing the new song, "Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation" (Revelation 5:9).

Then we read, "He shall prolong his days." Death that ends the days of fallen man, becomes the means of prolonging the days of this perfect Man. What a seeming paradox is this! As one has said, "He is 'cut off from the land of the living'; is buried, and yet He shall live and have continuance of days." The resurrection is the glorious answer to this paradox. It is no part of the pleasure of God that man should lie under the sentence of death, any more than that he should come under judgment for his sins. We see Jesus delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification, and we hear Him say, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I became dead, and behold I am living for evermore, and have the keys of death and of Hades." The Psalmist can say, "He asked life of thee, and thou gavest it him, even length of days for ever and ever" (Psalms 21:4). Thus we see the pleasure of the LORD, not only set forth in Christ, but secured by Christ.

We look on beyond all the failure of man and we see the day is coming when, as the result of all that Christ is, and all that He has done, the great host of the redeemed will be like Christ and with Christ. Then, indeed, the words of the prophet will be fulfilled, "He shall see of the fruit of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied" (N.T.). What a day of triumph will that be, when at last all His people are gathered home, when every trace of the wilderness journey is past, and they are presented to Christ all glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but are holy and without blemish. Then indeed, He will rise up and say, "I am satisfied", and the pleasure of the LORD will be accomplished. We shall be there "According to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved" (Ephesians 1:5-6).

Such is the eternal pleasure of God for Christ and His people, that will be most surely accomplished. In the meantime, as we pass along our way to the glory, God is working in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Php 2:13-16). It is God’s good pleasure that even now there should be an answer in His people to all that He has purposed for them. It is His pleasure that the flesh with all its murmuring and reasonings should be set aside, secondly, that Christ morally should be displayed in us by a life that is blameless, and harmless, and without rebuke; thirdly, that we should be a witness for God by shining as lights in a dark world, and holding forth the word of life in a world of death. If then this is His good pleasure for believers while yet in this world, may we join with the Apostle in praying that we may be made perfect "in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever" (Hebrews 12:21).

S. The Prayer.

The Prayer.

Ephesians 3:12-21. In the earlier part of the Third chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians the Apostle has unfolded to us the great mystery concerning Christ and the church, in which are found the unsearchable riches of Christ, and the all varied wisdom of God. Though it was given to the Apostle to minister this great truth, he realised that it was not within his power to enable the saints to apprehend the truth. If this great truth is to be apprehended in power in our souls so that it practically affects our lives, there must be a right spiritual state which alone can be produced by a work of God in the inner man.

It is helpful to notice the order in which the truth is presented in the Epistle:

Firstly, the Apostle unfolds truths connected with the great Mystery that had been revealed to him (Ephesians 3:1-11).

Secondly, he prays that there may be a right spiritual slate in the saints in order to apprehend the truth of the Mystery (Ephesians 3:12-21).

Thirdly, he exhorts us to a walk worthy of the truth of the Mystery (Ephesians 6:4-9).

Finally, he warns us as to the conflict that will be entailed by a walk in accordance with the truth of the Mystery (Ephesians 6:10-20). The great end, then, of the prayer is that a right state may be produced in believers. Without this spiritual state we shall not be able to apprehend the Mystery, walk in consistency with it, or stand firm in the conflict that a consistent walk will entail.

Though the truths of which the Apostle writes have been most graciously recovered to us in these last days, have we not to mourn the fact that we have but little responded to the truth, walked in consistency with it, or stood fast in the conflict that it entails? Why is it that we have so little valued, and responded to, this great truth? Do not the requests of this searching prayer supply the answer by suggesting that though we may have listened to the unfolding of the truth, and assented to the letter of the truth, yet we have lacked the spiritual condition that enables us to apprehend and value the truth in all its preciousness? If then we are awakened to a sense of the greatness of the truth, and desire to apprehend it in power, we shall do well to pay earnest heed to the Apostle’s prayer, and in our turn pray for this needed spiritual state.

(Ephesians 3:12). The Apostle prefaces his prayer by reminding us that "we have boldness of access" to the Father. By the grace of God, we have been set before the Father clear of sins and judgment, and in His favour, through the work of Christ. Thus "with confidence by the faith of Him" we have boldness in turning to the Father.

(Ephesians 3:13). Seeing we have this "boldness and access," we need not faint in the presence of tribulation. However great the trials, we have One, with all love and power and wisdom, to Whom we can turn. Paul and Silas may be beaten with stripes, thrust into the inner prison, and

their feet made fast in the stocks, but they have boldness and access to the Father, and in confidence and faith they avail themselves of this liberty by praying and singing praises unto God.

(Ephesians 3:14-15). Seeing that the prayer is concerned with the state of soul necessary to enter into eternal counsels, it is addressed to the Father from Whom all counsels flow (Ephesians 1:3). The Apostle reminds us that the Father, to Whom he turns in prayer, is the One "of Whom every family in heaven and earth is named." In Scripture "name" sets forth the special characteristics of the person, or family, to whom the name is given. The Father, according to His eternal counsels has determined that which is to be set forth in every family of believers, whether it be the Old Testament saints and the church in heaven, or Jewish and Gentile believers on earth in the day to come. Thus in turning to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Apostle is turning to One, Who, according to His counsels of love, has determined the special character that shall mark the church.

(Ephesians 3:16). Further, the Apostle desires that the Father would act according to the riches of His glory. The great end of all God’s ways with us is that there will be "glory to God in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages." In accord with the immense blessedness of this prospect, he desires that the Father would work in our souls even now to the end that we may apprehend the riches of the glory to which we are destined. To this end he desires that the Father would grant that we might be strengthened by His Spirit in the inner man. We may affect people’s imaginations by sensationalism, stir up their emotions by pathetic appeals, or instruct their intellects by eloquent and well-ordered discourses, but if there is to be a right moral state it can only be produced by the work of the Spirit.

Moreover, the Spirit works in connection with "the inner man" — that new man which is the result of the work of God in us, the man by which we are put in touch with unseen and eternal things. By the outward man — the body — we are in touch with the seen things of time. There are, indeed, the needs of the body — food and clothing — and the Lord can say, "Your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things," and in His tender care and mercy He meets these daily and temporal needs. Nevertheless, as we pass along our way the outward man grows weaker and perishes, but by the work of the Spirit "the inward man is renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16).

(Ephesians 3:17). Moreover, if the Spirit works "in the inner man," it is in order "that the Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith." The Spirit conies, as the Lord tells His disciples, to take of the things of Christ and show them unto us. As we hear of the things of Christ we become attracted to Christ, and attracted to Him He becomes the object of our faith, with the result that Christ will have a dwelling place in our hearts by faith. The actual words of the prayer are, "that the Christ may dwell, through faith, in your hearts." "The Christ," not only presents Christ personally, but Christ as the One Who, according to the counsels of the Father, is the Anointed Man to be the centre of the vast universe of bliss. The inner man is strengthened, not that we may perform miracles that may make a show before the world, or that we may become great preachers in the eyes of others, but that the Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith. As natural men self is the great object of our hearts, and everything is pursued that would gratify and exalt self. But the effect of the work of the Spirit in our hearts is to strengthen the inner man against every intrusion of the flesh, every temptation of the world, and every snare of the devil, so that self may be set aside and Christ have the supreme place in our hearts, and thus the One Who is the centre of the Father’s counsels may become the centre of our thoughts and affections. Christ dwelling in our hearts would lead to our being "rooted

and founded in love" (N. Tn.). The root is that from which the plant draws its nourishment; the foundation is that upon which we build. All the blessing of which the Apostle speaks is traced up to the heart of God — "His great love wherewith He loved us" (Ephesians 2:4). Moreover we do well to be "founded in love," building not on our love to God and to Christ, but on divine love to us. "We love Him because He first loved us." It is ever God's way to teach through the affections. Spiritual apprehension depends not upon human intelligence, but comes through divinely wrought affection in the soul.

Thus, in this first portion of the prayer, we see the great desire of the Apostle is that there might be a right spiritual state in the saints. It is wonderful to see that every Divine Person is engaged in order to produce this spiritual state. Thus the Apostle seeks that the Father should act according to the riches of His glory; that the Spirit should strengthen us in the inner man; and that the Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith. In the second portion of the prayer we learn that this right spiritual state, for which the Apostle prays, has in view a threefold object:

(Ephesians 3:18). Firstly, that we may be fully able to apprehend, with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height. Do not these words refer to the counsels of God as to this great mystery concerning Christ and the Church, of which the Apostle has been speaking? The breadth of His counsels will embrace all saints of every family. Amongst these families the Church has a special place of privilege and blessing. The length reaches from eternity, when the Church was counseled, to eternity yet to come, when it will be for the everlasting glory of God by Christ Jesus. The depth of this counsel was measured by Christ when, according to "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" He descended into the depth of our ruin and need. The height of His counsel brings us into the glory with Christ on high.

Secondly, the Apostle prays for a right spiritual state in order that we may know the love of Christ that passeth knowing. The love of the Father purposed us for blessing, and the love of Christ has made it possible for these purposes to be fulfilled. It is true that we can neither grasp the counsels of God in all their extent, nor the love of Christ which passeth knowing. Nevertheless, we can in measure apprehend the counsels and know the love. "To know the love of Christ" is more than knowing through the statements of God's word that Christ loves us. It is an experimental knowledge — the realised enjoyment of the love — this the Apostle desires that we may know. How wonderful that the Christ, Who is the centre of the vast scene of glory in all its breadth, length, depth and height, can be known in a personal and intimate way by each one of us as the One that loves us and has given Himself for us! Christ desires that we should know His love, for He ever appreciates the response to His love that attaches us to Himself. In a pre-eminent degree the Apostle John knew the love of Christ, for five times he describes himself as the disciple that Jesus loved, and in all the nearness that the knowledge of His love gives, he could confide in the Lord and rest his head upon His bosom. The appreciation of the love of Christ by Mary and the Apostle John, brought these disciples nearer to the Lord than the activity of Martha and the zeal of Peter.

Thirdly, the apprehension of the counsels of God and the appreciation of the love of Christ, leads to the third great result of a right spiritual state — that we "might be filled with all the fulness of God." Does not the fulness of God speak of all that God is in His moral attributes, His holiness, His love, and His grace. A vessel could be filled with water, but no vessel could hold the ocean. So our little vessels cannot take in all the fulness of God, but it is possible for the fulness of God to fill our

little vessels. Thus the beautiful character of God, as He has been pleased to reveal Himself, should fill the saints, and be seen in the saints.

(Ephesians 3:20). Having made known his requests, the Apostle expresses His confidence in God by commending us to God — the One who is able to give an abundant answer to our prayers "above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us." It will be noticed that in the prayer of the First chapter the Apostle desires that we may know "the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward." Doubtless, in all our circumstances, and trials, it is our joy to know that the power of God is toward us and for us: nevertheless, here, the Apostle speaks of the power of God that works in us to produce a right spiritual state. In other prayers, the Apostle prays that we may walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work (Colossians 1:9-10). Again he desires the prayers of the saints that utterance may be given to make known the mystery of the Gospel (Ephesians 6:19; Colossians 4:3). But in this great prayer he is not concerned with the walk or service of the saints, but rather with a right spiritual state that is the true preparation for all walk and service. Alas we may be very careful to do nothing in our walk that would lower us in the eyes of others, and very diligent in outward service that might exalt us in the esteem of our brethren, and yet careless as to the inward state of soul that is only known to God.

(Ephesians 3:21). The Apostle closes his prayer with a beautiful ascription of praise to God. Thus the great end in view is, not simply our blessing, however greatly we shall be blessed, but God’s eternal glory. The church, though formed in time, belongs to eternity. Counseled in eternity, before time began, it will be for the glory of God through eternal ages yet to come. Furthermore we shall never forget that all the glory of God in the church is secured "by Christ Jesus." The glory of God in the church, was counseled by the Father, secured by the work of Christ for us, and made good by the work of the Spirit in us.

H. Smith.

S. The Rapture

The Rapture

Hamilton Smith.

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There is a very definite feeling amongst the people of God that the day of grace is about to close. In the words of the prophet we may say. "The day goeth away, for the shadows of the evening are stretched out." For the Christian, we may add, in the words of the Apostle "The night is far spent, the day is at hand".

Even men of the world have a vague uneasy feeling that some great crisis is approaching. What form it will take, and how to meet it they know not. Christians, however, with the Bible in their hands, Christ in the heart, and the Holy Spirit to guide, are not left in darkness. They know that Christ is coming, and that His coming is very near. We realise in some measure the deep need of this sad world, and we know that all the efforts of men to meet that need will be in vain. Kings and Dictators, Parliaments and Committees, may for a time and in some limited measure, relieve local distress, but they cannot remove the universal misery of a world under sin and death. Neither conferences and leagues, nor treaties and pacts, will end the sorrows of the Jew, the misgovernment of the Gentile, nor the corruptions of Christendom.

There is only One who can deal with all the evil, end the sorrows of the earth, hush creation’s groan maintain the glory of God, and bring in universal blessing for man. Whether realised or not, the great need of the Jew, the Gentile, and the Church, is the coming of Christ; as we sometimes sing, Lord, Lord Thy fair creation groans, The air, the earth, the sea In unison with all our hearts, And calls aloud for Thee. The condition of the professing people of God, in these last closing moments, may well solemnise our hearts, and humble us in the dust. It is foreshadowed in the condition that existed, among the people of God in the closing days of Old Testament history, for history has a strange way of repeating itself. At that time Israel had utterly broken down; the little remnant who had returned from captivity had completely failed. But in the midst of all the prevailing corruption there were a few godly souls who feared the Lord, thought upon His Name, and spake often one to another. One thing marked them above all else — they looked for the coming of Christ. They did not look for improvement in the world; they had no thought of seeking to put things right in Israel; they made no pretension to be anything themselves but they looked for the Sun of righteousness to arise with healing in His wings. Their only hope was the coming of Christ. Amongst themselves all was weakness; behind them all was failure, around them all was corruption; but before them stretched the glory to be ushered in by the coming of Christ. Their position, in very many ways, sets forth that of the people of God today. The Jew has crucified his Messiah, and has been scattered over the world; the Gentile has so utterly broken down in government, that civilisation seems on the verge of being lost in a welter of lust and violence; the Church has utterly failed in its responsibility as a witness for Christ; and those who, in the midst of

the ruin, have sought to answer to the mind of God, have utterly broken down. The failure on man's side, is absolute and irretrievable. But our only hope remains, Christ is coming; and in spite of all the failure behind us, and around us, the glory lies before us.

If then the coming of Christ is the great hope that is set before us for our special encouragement and comfort, in a day of ruin, we shall do well to examine Scripture, not with the vain idea of attempting to fix a date for the coming, or indulging the fleshly love of prying into the future, but with the desire of having our affections awakened towards the One who is coming.

First let us turn to Scriptures which establish the great facts that the Lord Jesus is coming to reign in glory, and that when He comes His saints will come with Him. Then we may look at Scriptures that tell us how the saints will be brought to Christ, in order to come with Him.

Turning to the last Epistle in the New Testament we find we are carried back by Jude to the first Book in the Bible, to learn that in less than seven hundred years after the Creation of man the world had become apostate. In the days of Enoch the world was approaching the great crisis of the Flood. No hope was held out of any recovery of an apostate world; but, in view of the judgment to come we have the first great prophecy of the coming of Christ. Enoch says, "Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousand of His saints" (Jude 1:14). The world passes on to judgment, the saints are preserved to come with Christ in glory.

Passing on to the prophet Zechariah, who prophesied in the day of Israel's ruin at the close of the Old Testament history, we find he holds out no hope of the recovery of the nation; but, in view of another great crisis, there is again held out before the saints the hope of the coming of Christ. The prophet says, "The LORD my God shall come, and all the saints with thee" (Zechariah 14:5). Again the world passes on to judgment, but the saints are preserved to come with Christ.

Now may we listen to the testimony of the Apostle John, as declared in Revelation 19:11-16? His prophetic utterances close the witness of the New Testament. John speaks in view of another great crisis in the history of the world — the complete break down of the nations and of Christendom. As in the days of Enoch before the close of the Old World, and as in the days of Zechariah before the close of the Old Testament, so in the days that will close the course of this present world, we learn there is no hope but in the coming of Christ, and that when the "heaven is opened", and the "King of kings" comes forth, the armies of heaven will follow Him. Thus again we learn that the present world rolls on to judgment, but the saints are preserved to come with Christ. To anyone subject to the Word of God these Scriptures, with many others that might be cited, definitely prove that the Lord Jesus is coming to earth the second time, in power and glory, and when He comes His saints will come with Him. Seeing however, that from the beginning of history to the present day, generations of saints have passed away, and their bodies have been laid in the grave, and that, at the present moment, millions of believers are living on the earth, while Christ is in heaven, the question naturally arises, How will the saints join Christ to come with Him? This important question was allowed to be raised very early in the history of the Church, that we might have an inspired answer through the Apostle Paul. His first Epistle to the Thessalonians was written to give us the answer. In the first chapter of this Epistle we are told that these Thessalonian saints had been "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven . . . even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come". When Christ appears the second time it will be in wrath, or judgment, upon the nations that have rejected Him; but with

complete deliverance for His people who have suffered persecution for His name’s sake. These Thessalonian saints were sustained in the midst of their persecutions by rightly looking forward to a glorious answer to all their sufferings at the appearing of Christ, when they would share with Him in the glories of the Kingdom. This hope will not be disappointed; but as time passed on, and the coming of Christ was delayed, some of their number "fell asleep". This troubled them with the thought that possibly the saints who had passed away, would miss all the blessings and glories of the reign of Christ, that would be enjoyed by those who were alive on earth when Christ appeared. They probably had no question as to their eternal blessing, or that they would enjoy the heavenly blessings of the Father’s house, but they feared they would miss the Kingdom glories. The Apostle meets this difficulty in the fourth chapter of the Epistle. He first sets their minds at rest in regard to those who had been taken from them. He would not have us ignorant "concerning them which are asleep" (verse 13).

These saints were in ignorance, and sorrow was the result of their ignorance. The Apostle wishes to dispel their darkness, and wipe away their tears. And the way he takes is the only effectual way of dispelling the clouds and ending the sorrow. He presents Christ. He reminds us that Jesus has died and is risen again; and that His death and resurrection is the great pattern of them that sleep. Christ’s resurrection was secret; so, indeed, will be the resurrection of His sleeping saints. Just as we believe one, so we can believe the other. Unknown to the world they will be raised again in order that God may bring them with Jesus (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

Still the question remains, How will these risen saints, and how will the living saints, be brought to be with the Lord, so that they may come with Him? This question the Apostle proceeds to answer in the parenthetical verses, 15 to 18, of chapter 4. The Apostle stresses the importance of this passage by specially reminding us that he is speaking "by the Word of the Lord ". We know that all his Epistles were inspired, but there are truths of such special importance that he introduces them with the reminder that he speaks by special revelation. The truth of the gospel, the truth of the Mystery, the Lord’s Supper, and, in this passage, the truth of the Rapture of the saints are all introduced in this way (Galatians 1:12; 1 Corinthians 11:23; Ephesians 3:3; 1 Thessalonians 4:15).

This, perhaps, is the only Scripture that directly tells us how we shall be taken to be with the Lord. There are, however, two other Scriptures to which we may profitably refer before examining this passage.

First, 1 Corinthians 15:51-53. In this chapter the great subject is resurrection. The coming of the Lord is not actually mentioned though we know, from 1 Thessalonians 4:1-18, that the events of which these verses speak, will take place at His coming. The Apostle says, "Behold I show you a mystery," and then he tells the secret that "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed." That we are coming with the Lord was no secret, for, as we have seen, Enoch and the prophets had spoken about this great event. But no prophet had ever hinted that a number of saints would never pass through death. This, indeed, was a secret reserved for the New Testament times. But if all will not pass through death, all will be changed. The sleeping saints will be "raised incorruptible", and the mortal bodies of the living will "put on immortality". The passage, however, does not go further. If we only had this Scripture we should not know into what likeness we are changed, nor what would happen to us when we are changed. This then is the first step in the great event that leads to our being with Christ. "We shall all be changed."

Passing on to the second Scripture, we read, in Php 3:20-21, that "we look for the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour who shall change our body of humiliation that it may be fashioned like unto His body of glory". This Scripture throws further light on this momentous event. The Epistle to the Corinthians has told us we shall be changed. This passage tells us we shall be changed into the likeness of Christ. Not only shall we be morally like Him, but we shall have bodies of glory like His own. In the light of this revelation we may well ask ourselves, Why this amazing grace? Why are poor sinners such as ourselves going to have these bodies of humiliation fashioned like His own glorious body? Ah! we know the answer, we are going to be like Him that we may be the everlasting witness to the worth of His Person and the efficacy of His work. Think of that poor degraded thief on the Cross, think of the proud Christ-hating Pharisee Saul of Tarsus; then pass on in thought to heaven and as, in the day to come, we gaze upon these men as glorified saints shall we not see the amazing efficacy of the work of Christ, that removes every trace of sin, and enables these men to be changed into the likeness of Christ. And what is true of these men will be true of all the saints in that vast scene of glory. When we come out in His likeness it will be according to the riches of His grace, and to the praise of the glory of His grace.

Thus we learn from Philippians that when changed it will be into the likeness of Christ, but this passage does not state what will happen to us when changed. For this further truth we must return to the fourth chapter of the First Epistle of Thessalonians. There, in verse 16, we read that "the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven". Here then we have the blessed intimation that the Lord is coming for us. The language is very explicit. It is not simply stated that the Lord shall descend, but that the Lord, Himself, shall descend. This is in accord with the Lord’s own words to His disciples, "I will come again and receive you unto myself." He will not be accompanied with the great host of His holy Angels as when He comes to earth. He will come alone to meet His saints, even, as in the beautiful type, Isaac goes forth alone at eventide to meet his bride as she comes up from her wilderness journey.

Then let us notice, it is not a descent to earth, as when He appears to reign, and His feet stand once again on the Mount of Olives. It truly says He will descend, but it very precisely says it is a descent from heaven, not a descent to earth.

Moreover, we are told, that at the moment of His coming there will be a triple summons. The assembling shout, the voice of the Archangel, and the trump of God. From 1 Corinthians 15:1-58, we know that the trump of God raises the sleeping saints. The voice of the Archangel does not imply that the Archangel is present, or that the Archangel speaks, as our translation might suggest. The true translation is "with an assembling shout, with archangel’s voice, and with trump of God". There is no article before Archangel and trump. It is simply characteristic of the Lord’s voice. He speaks in this way, with Archangel’s voice, and it may be this is the voice that changes the living saints, as the trump of God raises the dead. Then with an assembling shout He gathers both classes of saints together, and calls them to Himself.

Having assembled His saints we are caught up together. How blessed to know that, in this happy moment, so soon to come, all the things that have divided the saints will vanish away, and the humiliating divisions that have rent the Church of God, and scattered the people of God, will be for ever past. At last for one brief moment, it would seem, in the very scene of all the failure, His people will be together. For it will not be in little companies or groups of saints that we shall be

taken. It will be no partial rapture by detachments, as some falsely teach today, for the word is "We . . . shall be caught up together."

Further, we learn that the meeting will take place in the air. Then how blessedly it all concludes, "So shall we ever be with the Lord." It is the Lord Who will bring us together, and the Lord Who will hold us together; never more to be divided from one another, never more to be separated from the Lord. "Wherefore," says the Apostle, "comfort one another with these words."

Here, then we have the mystery of His coming, the secret rapture of the saints by which they are taken from earth to meet Christ in the air, that they may be with Him when He comes.

Nevertheless, this great passage does not go beyond the meeting in the air. It is silent as to what happens after that wondrous meeting. Turning to the first three verses of John 14:1-31, we hear of a further stage in our journey to the glory of the Kingdom. Here the Lord tells us that He has gone to prepare a place for us in the Father’s house, and that when He comes again it will be to receive us unto Himself. That meeting, we know from Thessalonians 4, will take place in the air. Having received us to Himself, He will conduct us into the Father’s house, as He so blessedly says, "that where I am, there ye may be also." He is leading us along the path of life which He Himself has trodden, and which leads to fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore in the Father’s house. The last stage in the path to glory will be when Christ comes forth to reign. At His first coming He came in humiliation, and in circumstances of weakness. At His second coming the heavens will open and He will come forth as the King of kings, and the Lord of lords. His mighty angels will accompany Him, the armies in heaven will follow Him, and, Enoch’s prophecy will be fulfilled, "Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints."

These are the stages on our way to glory. First the meeting with the Lord in the air; then to pass in to the joys of the Father’s house; lastly to come forth with Christ to share His Kingdom and His throne. This then is the blessed hope that lies before us; The joy of the Lord’s presence. The fulness of the Father’s house, and The glory of the everlasting kingdom.

We may add, in the great eternity beyond there lies the eternal state in the new heaven and the new earth where God will be all in all.

Seeing then that we wait for these coming glories, we may well say, "What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God."

S. The Returned Remnant.

The Returned Remnant.

Some five hundred years before the Lord came into the world, an opportunity was given, through the providential goodness of God, for His earthly people to escape from the captivity in Babylon, and to return to God's land and build God's House. The mass of God's people chose to remain in the land of their captivity; but a remnant of about forty-two thousand, "whose spirit God had stirred," left Babylon and returned to Jerusalem (Ezra 1:5). Having returned, and set up an altar for worship, at once they were faced with the opposition of those who sought to hinder the special work for which they had been set free from Babylon. For, be it noted, this opposition was, not against the return to the land, but against the building of the house and the walls of the city (Ezra 4:1; Ezra 4:12). Through the weakness of the people this opposition for a time succeeded. But sixteen years after the return, God raised up the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, who aroused the people, under the leadership of Zerubbabel, and Joshua, to complete the building of the house of God.

Having failed to stop the building of the house, the enemy made a second attempt to mar their witness for God by seeking to lower their walk, through leading them into worldly associations. Thus, when Ezra, with a further band of exiles returned to the land, it came to light that many of the people, including some of their leaders, were associating with the people of the adjoining lands and doing according to their abominations (Ezra 9:1). The walk that is worthy of God's house, and the necessary discipline of the house, had not been maintained. Through the ministry of Ezra, the people humbled themselves before God, confessed their sins, and dealt with this evil.

Thirteen years pass, and this remnant that had escaped from captivity, was in great affliction and reproach, Seeing that "the wall of Jerusalem," that speaks of separation, was broken down; and "the gates" that stand for the place of discipline, were burned with fire (Nehemiah 1:2-3). Under the exhortations of Nehemiah, the people were led to build the walls and erect the gates (Nehemiah 3:1-32; Nehemiah 6:15). The result was that once again separation and discipline were maintained.

Alas! in spite of these conflicts and revivals, we find, only a few years later, in the days of Malachi, that, though the house of God had been rebuilt, and the walls and the gates set up, and a regular service of sacrifices and feasts was being conducted, yet the moral state of both leaders and led was at such a thoroughly low ebb that, when rebuked by the Messenger of the LORD, they were blind to their condition and indifferent to the LORD'S warnings.

Four hundred and eighty years later, when the Lord came to the earth, we discover this returned remnant had become divided into several parties — Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians. When brought into the presence of the Lord, the low condition of every party was made manifest. It is true they were no longer associated with Babylonish corruptions; nor were they giving way to idolatry. Moreover, the temple was rebuilt, and the round of religious services was being

performed. But the Lord has to charge them with being hypocrites, seeing that though they honoured God with their lips, their heart was far from Him (Mark 7:6). Furthermore, like the fig tree with its leaves but no fruit, they made a great show of piety before men, but in their lives there was no fruit for God; and the house that they had been set free to build for God’s service, they had corrupted for their own ends (Mark 11:12-15).

Thus, in the day of the Lord it is clear that, on the one hand, the great mass of God’s earthly people were still dispersed in captivity amidst Babylonish and other corruptions, though, indeed, amongst them were many God-fearing individuals, as we know from the glimpse we have of them in the books of Esther and Daniel. On the other hand, as we have seen, those "whose spirit God had stirred" in the beginning to return to the land and build the house, had in their end become broken up into different parties, marked with much outward piety before men but with little or no fruit before God; with faultless expressions on their lips when they approached God, but with hearts far from Him.

We do well to ask ourselves, Has the solemn history of this returned remnant no warning voice for the people of God today? And, very specially, does it not speak to those who, over one hundred years ago, had their eyes opened to see the truth of the church as the house of God in which the Spirit dwells, and as the body of which Christ is Head? (Ephesians 1:22-23; Ephesians 2:20-22). With their spirits moved by God to answer to this light concerning Christ and the church, a number of God’s people, in obedience to His word, separated from the systems of men, and took a place outside the camp order of religion, to gather to Christ as the alone Head of the church, and to seek to walk in the light of the house of God and the body of Christ.

Alas! as of old the returned remnant broke down in responsibility, so again we have to face the sad fact that those who have left the systems of men to gather to Christ have grievously failed. In the presence of this failure, it surely becomes us to look back and ask ourselves, What has been the history of this movement? Then to look round and ask, What is the present condition of those who have professed to return to God’s ground for His people?

Looking back, does it not become clear that from the outset, and through the passing years, those who have taken this path in obedience to the word of God, have had to face the constant attacks of the enemy in different forms? As with the returned remnant of old, the first great attack of the enemy was an effort to undermine and set aside the principles of God’s house that they were seeking to maintain, by once again setting up a system of clericalism that ignored the presence of the Spirit of God and the Lordship and Headship of Christ. Moreover, through the passing years has it not become plain that, apart from adopting a system that is an actual denial of the house of God, we have failed by neglecting the truth of the house of God? Further, as in the days of Haggai, behind this neglect we have to judge ourselves for the worldliness that has sought our own things rather than the things of God. This neglect of the truth and worldliness have led to the gradual breaking down of the walls of separation, and to laxity in the exercise of a Scriptural discipline.

If, as we look back, we have to confess that this has been our sorrowful history, what, we may ask, is the result as we look round on present conditions? Are we not at once faced with the humbling fact that those, who left the systems of men to give Christ His place as the one Lord, and as the Head, and walk in the unity of the body, have so failed in subjection to the Lord, and in holding the Head, that, like the returned remnant of old, they have become broken and divided? Have we not

to admit, as one has said, that, "The failure of the church is universal; and among all the fragments thereof, nowhere more marked than with Brethren, so-called. If I imagine that, in the wreck, one entire company has alone preserved its integrity, and is right where all else is wrong, it is tantamount to saying that one has not yet discovered the totality of the ruin." (W. H. Westcott.)

Furthermore, have we not to confess that behind this state of division, and the immediate causes of different divisions, there exists a low moral condition. Thus while each company of God's people may still profess to be gathered to the Name of the Lord, with the Lord in the midst, should we not find, if we really got into the presence of the Lord, that while we may draw near to God with faultless expressions of prayer and praise on our lips, too often our hearts may have been far from Him; and that while there may be the outward profession of piety before men, there is too little fruit in our secret lives before God. We may well recall the warning words, written by a servant of the Lord in 1853, when he said, "Saints gathered together in the name of the Lord Jesus, have to do with realities. In His presence everything is exposed, naked and bare before the eyes of Him with Whom we have to do. It is one thing to have got into our place . . . as gathered together in the Name of Jesus, and it is another to learn what is befitting the place; in other words, how to behave in it. Realities, not pretensions, have their answer in God. Now in our day, we have had too little reality, and too much pretension. . . . Believers need to see and acknowledge their nakedness, abandon their folly, and in humility own things as they are. . The presence of the Holy Ghost is a reality, and surely leads to acknowledgement of our real condition" (Present Testimony 4:155). In the presence of this failure we may well ask, What can those do who own the breakdown and desire to answer to the mind of God, as set forth in Scripture, for a day of ruin? We have already seen that the history, and failure of the returned remnant, would seem to foreshadow, in a solemn way, our own breakdown. But, in seeking to learn God's mind in the midst of this breakdown, may we not also turn with profit to another side of the history of the returned remnant which is rich with instruction and encouragement? Let us remember that throughout the history of this remnant, with all its failure, there existed those who feared the LORD, who mourned the low condition, who confessed the failure, and sought to be true to God's house. This remnant within the remnant is clearly seen in the day of Ezra, when a number confessed their failure and "wept very sore" (Ezra 10:1). Again we hear of them in the day of Malachi when we read of those "that feared the LORD, and thought upon His Name." Centuries later, when Christ came to the earth, we find that, amidst the increasing gloom of the passing years, God had preserved a remnant for Himself. Thus, if the presence of the Lord exposed the low condition of the mass, it also brought to light the existence of these godly individuals of whom Zacharias and his wife, Joseph and Mary, Simeon and Anna were shining examples.

Seeing then that this godly remnant had the special approval of the Lord, it will be well to carefully consider their distinguishing trials as recorded by the Spirit of God. Their first, and outstanding characteristic, was that they "feared the LORD" (Malachi 3:16). Does this not imply that they were not content with an outward show of piety before men, or with a round of religious services, or with drawing near to God with correct expressions on their lips, but that their secret lives were lived in the sense of being under the eye of God. They were conscious that their words were heard by God; their acts seen by God, and their thoughts known to God. With the Psalmist, such could say, "He that planteth the ear, shall He not hear? He that formed the eye, shall He not see? . . . He that teacheth man knowledge, shall He not know?" (Psalms 94:9-10). Being right with God, there was

nothing to hinder fellowship with one another. So we read that, they "spake often one to another." This was the second great mark of this godly remnant. Their common fear of the LORD drew them together in a holy happy fellowship of which the LORD was the bond. A third characteristic was that, they not only feared the LORD, but they "thought upon His Name." Does this not imply that they turned from themselves and their fellowmen to delight their souls in the excellencies and glory of the LORD; for "name" in Scripture describes the character of the One bearing the name? But also, it surely suggests, that in all their ways, and walk, and associations, they did not consider what would be for their earthly advantage and ease, but what would be for the glory of the LORD'S great Name they "thought upon His Name." A further distinguishing mark of this godly remnant was that they had before them the coming of Christ, for we read, "Unto you that fear my Name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings." They had no expectation that the surrounding darkness would be dispelled or that the world would grow better, or that any general healing would take place among the people of God "Until the day break, and the shadows flee away," when the Sun of righteousness will arise with healing in His wings.

Such were the outstanding marks of this godly remnant within the remnant. We do not hear that they were marked by great gifts that might have exalted them among the people of God; or great works of charity that would have earned the world's applause; or great numbers that would have brought them into prominence. But, in spite of their outward weakness, and smallness of numbers, they had the LORD'S approval in a day of ruin, and will shine as His jewels in the day of glory. As with this godly remnant, so now, we are living in a day of ruin and breakdown, not only in the government of the world, and in the great Christian profession, but also amongst the true people of God. But as of old, so again we have clear indications in the New Testament, that in spite of all the general breakdown, there has been, and will be to the end, a godly remnant. Furthermore, we learn from the word what are the outstanding marks of those who, in these last difficult days, meet with the LORD'S approval, as well as the path they are called to tread in the midst of the ruin.

First, as with the godly in the midst of the returned remnant, let us own our failure and humble ourselves in the dust before God, judging the low moral condition that has led to confusion and division. As we have seen, Ezra confessed the failure with weeping. The Lord, in His day, wept over the low condition of the returned remnant. The apostle Paul warned the saints "night and day with tears" as he foresaw the ruin coming in amongst the people of God. Timothy, in his day, was a man of tears. Let us challenge ourselves! Have we, with broken hearts ever wept before the Lord over our individual and collective failures?

Secondly, as of old in the presence of their weakness and failure, the godly found relief in turning to the LORD, so, let us remember, that however great our failure, however many our difficulties, and whatever our weakness, we have an unfailing resource in CHRIST, Himself. Of Him we can say, Thou remainest," and "Thou art the Same" (Hebrews 1:11-12). In the divided state of the Lord's people we may seek to escape from false doctrine or evil ways, or relief from looseness and independency, by changing from one company to another. But is this the Lord's way of relief? When the disciples had to face the storm in a ship "tossed with waves," Peter did not seek a way of escape from the danger by leaving one ship to join another ship. His resource was CHRIST. Acting in faith, and attracted by love, he left the ship, and walked on the water, "to go to JESUS," In obedience to the word, we rightly leave the camp order of religion, but, in doing so let our first great object be to "go forth . . .unto HIM without the camp." Unless Christ be our centre of

gathering we shall only end in forming another company after the order of the camp.

Thirdly, as with the godly of old, who "Thought upon His Name," if we have CHRIST before us, we shall refuse all that in principle or practice is a denial of His Lordship and Headship. This will involve that, in obedience to Scripture we take the path of separation; for the word is "Let every one that nameth the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity." Again, each one is exhorted to purge himself from vessels to dishonour by "separating himself from them" (2 Timothy 2:19-21, N. Tn.). Further, in view of these last difficult days, when professing Christendom becomes a vast system having the form of piety, but denying the power thereof, we are exhorted "to turn away" from such; in other words, we are to "go forth without the camp" (2 Timothy 3:5; Hebrews 13:13). This will involve that we not only separate from corrupt bodies where wrong doctrine and evil practices are unjudged, but that we must come out from every company that by their principles and practices deny the truth of the fellowship into which we are called, and the one body of which we form part.

Fourthly, if we have taken the separate path to give Christ His place as Lord and Head, and walk in the light of the truth, let us each seek to be found walking in a right moral condition in our individual lives before God. As with the godly of Malachi's day, let us walk in the fear of God. It is not enough to separate from that which is false, for as it has been said, "If we carry with us the seeds of the corruption, unheeded and unjudged, the result will be the same again, only worse, by reason of our increased light, responsibility and profession" (Present Testimony 4:352). Let us each take heed to the word that exhorts us to lay "aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speaking" (1 Peter 2:1). Having gone forth "unto Him," let us seek to abide in Him and thus walk in secret communion with Him. It has been well said that "Christ must live in me, if I am to live like Christ or for Christ."

Fifthly, let us each seek to get back to "first love." If that which had the Lord's approval, above all else, at the beginning of the church period, was personal love to Himself, so at the end, when all has been ruined in our hands through the loss of first love, that which the Lord looks for is individual love to Himself. His last appeal to His own, in the midst of the ruin, is to remind us of His love, and seek the response of our love. Thus we hear Him say, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore and repent. Behold I stand at the door, and am knocking: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me" (Revelation 3:19-20). He is not demanding some great sacrifice or service that will make a display before the world, or exalt us in the eyes of men; but He looks for a heart that will respond to His love, and thus be led into communion with Himself. To such an one He may indeed open a door of service, but it will be service flowing from love.

Sixthly, if, as with the godly in the days of Malachi, we seek individually to walk in the fear of the LORD, it will also be our privilege, as in their case, to have fellowship with one another. Of those saints we read that they "spake often one to another." And in this day of breakdown, those who have separated from the corruptions of Christendom are encouraged to "follow righteousness, faith, love, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:22). They may be but a feeble few, but they have the word of the Lord that tells us "where two or three are gathered together unto my Name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). Such will make no pretension of being the only people on earth with whom the Lord is found, nor will they

seek to form a new fellowship. They will seek in humble obedience to the word to act in the light of the fellowship into which all saints have been called, and of the one body of which all saints form part.

Lastly, as in the days of Malachi, the godly had before them the coming of Christ, and realised that there would be no recovery for Israel until the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings, so, it is our privilege to have before us the coming of the Lord, owning that no power on earth can patch up the fragments of the scattered church, or heal the sorrows of the world. He alone can gather His people together, heal the broken hearts, bind up our wounds and still the storms of life.

If, then, these are some of the outstanding marks that Scripture sets before us, of those that have the approval of the LORD, both in the closing days of the Jewish period, and in the last days of Christendom, may we seek grace to profit by the example of the godly remnant of old, and answer to the Lord’s mind for His own today. Thus amid the encircling gloom may it be the desire of our hearts to be found walking in the fear of the LORD, obedient to the word of the LORD, jealous of the Name of the LORD, and looking for the coming of the LORD.

H. Smith.

S. The Riches of the Mystery.

The Riches of the Mystery.

Ephesians 3:1-11.

We are living in a period marked by all the difficulties that Scripture has warned us would characterise the last days. Nevertheless, in these difficult times, the grace of God has recovered to His people the great truth of the Mystery concerning Christ and His church. As of old, in the days of the captivity, the mass of God's earthly people were in bondage to Babylon, so today the greater number of professing Christians are associated with the Babylonish corruptions of Christendom, and are either ignorant of, or wholly indifferent to, the truth that God has recovered to His people. Nevertheless, as in that day, God opened a door for His people to return to His land, and build His house, and a little remnant gladly availed themselves of this way of escape; so, today, the eyes and hearts of a few believers have been opened to see and value the truths recovered concerning Christ and the church; and, in obedience to the Word, such have taken a place apart from the organised Camp of Christendom in order to walk in the light of these truths.

Moreover, as in the days of old, the returned remnant from Babylon at once found themselves opposed by enemies from without and within, who sought to thwart the purpose for which they had returned to God's land; so, today, those who have sought to answer to God's mind for His people have found themselves in constant conflict with the enemy who has sought by opposition from without, and contentions within, either to rob the people of God of these truths, or once again to entangle them with the corruptions of Christendom, and organisations of men, that in different measures deny these truths.

Further, it is clear from Scripture, that though the returned remnant from Babylon miserably broke down, yet when the Lord came to earth there were still found a few earnest believers who in great weakness were true to the purpose for which they had been delivered from Babylon, and who were looking for the Lord. So, in our day, however great has been the failure and breakdown of those to whom the precious truths concerning Christ and the church have been revealed, yet Scripture clearly indicates that there will be those who, with but a little strength, will keep the Lord's word and not deny His Name until His coming. Every true heart among those who have received the light of the Mystery will surely desire to be found of this number.

If, however, we are to be found answering to the Lord's mind, it behoves us to seek earnestly to enter into the truth of the Mystery, to have, as the Apostle says "the full knowledge of the mystery of God: in which are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:2-3, N.Tn.). In seeking to enter into the truth of "the Mystery" it is important to remember that the word "mystery ""is used in Scripture in different connections. Thus we read of the "Mysteries of the Kingdom" (Matthew 13:11). Then the change of these mortal bodies is spoken of as "a mystery" (1 Corinthians 15:51). Again we read of "the mystery of godliness" (1 Timothy 3:16). Further we read of "the mystery of iniquity," and on the forehead of the false woman is written, "Mystery, Babylon

the great" (2 Thessalonians 2:7; Revelation 17:5). There are, however, several passages, found only in the Epistles of Paul, in which he speaks of "the Mystery" (Romans 16:25; Ephesians 1:9; Ephesians 3:3-4; Ephesians 3:9; Ephesians 5:32; Colossians 1:26-27; Colossians 2:2; Colossians 4:3). In all these passages the word is used to set forth the truth concerning Christ and the church. We do well to remember that this mystery does not refer only to the church, nor exclusively to Christ, for as the Apostle can say, "This is a great mystery; but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:32).

Before looking at the passages which speak of this great mystery it is well to remark that in Scripture the word "mystery" does not mean something that is mysterious in the sense of being impossible for a human being to fathom or understand. The word refers rather to truths which can only be known by divine revelation, and when revealed can only be understood by those taught of God. Further, mysteries in Scripture always have reference to the time of Christ's absence. A mystery is something that cannot exist in the public ways of God. This is very manifest in connection with the mysteries of the Kingdom which obviously refer to the form the Kingdom takes during the absence of Christ. There will be no mystery when the Kingdom is established. So, too, the mystery of iniquity and of Babylon will be over when these evils are dealt with in the day of the Lord. So the great mystery concerning Christ and the church refers, not only to the truth as to Christ and the church which will come into display in the day to come, but also to the formation of the church during the absence of Christ. This could not take place in the public ways of God either in the past or in the day to come. In the past the nation of Israel was called out from the Gentiles and under their law had to remain apart. In the future restored Israel will be a distinct nation with Christ their King. Today all distinctions between Jew and Gentile are for the time set aside, and believers are called out from both to form a joint body of which Christ is the Head in heaven. In the fifth chapter of Ephesians, speaking of the natural relationships of husband and wife, the Apostle says, "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh." In this relationship he sees a figure of the far greater relationship of Christ and the church, for at once the Apostle adds, "This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:31-32). Have we not here an allusion to the fact that during the time that Christ is cut off from His earthly people — His kindred according to the flesh — the church is formed and united to Christ in the glory? Of this great truth Joseph of old is a striking type. During the time he was cut off from his kindred according to the flesh, he was exalted to the highest place of glory and Asenath was given to him to be his bride. Thus, in type, the mystery is disclosed that during the rejection and absence of Christ there will be formed a company of believers drawn from Jews and Gentiles and united to one another and to Christ in the glory. This great truth is brought before us in the Third chapter of Ephesians. This chapter, it will be noticed, is a parenthetical chapter coming in between the doctrine at the close of Ephesians 2:1-22, and the practical exhortations based upon the doctrine in Ephesians 4:1-32. The chapter is plainly divided into two portions; the first thirteen verses unfolding to us truths concerning the mystery, while the latter verses present the Apostle's prayer that we may be in the spiritual condition that will enable us to apprehend the mystery.

(Ephesians 3:1-2). The Apostle opens this portion of his Epistle by telling us that the proclamation of this great truth had raised opposition against him which finally brought him into prison. The Jew resented any teaching that set aside the distinction between Jew and Gentile which had been

established and sanctioned by God according to their own Scriptures. They failed to see that owing to the rejection of their own Messiah. Israel had come under the governmental judgment of God. It had become manifest that, "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Jew and Gentile had come on to one common ground before God. Then we learn that God, in His infinite wisdom, takes occasion by the utter ruin of man, to fall back on His sovereignty and reveal to us His eternal counsels whereby He will secure a heavenly people called from Jew and Gentile, and united to Christ in glory. The dispensation ("administration" or "stewardship") of this great mystery had been committed to the Apostle Paul.

(Ephesians 3:3-4). This great truth, of which the Apostle was the steward, he had not received from men. It had been made known to him by direct revelation, as he had already explained in a brief letter so that the Gentile believers, to whom he was writing, would understand from whence he derived his knowledge of the mystery. Thus though coming through the Apostle we can receive it as coming from a divine source and therefore with all the assurance of divine authority (2 Timothy 3:14).

(Ephesians 3:5). In other ages this great truth was not made known to the sons of men as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets. The Apostle is clearly speaking of the New Testament prophets. It is evident that the truth was revealed to others, but that the Apostle was the special vessel chosen to administer this great truth. Thus it is only in his Epistles we find any mention of the mystery.

(Ephesians 3:6). In this brief verse the Apostle sums up the truth of the mystery, "That the Gentiles should be joint heirs, and a joint body, and joint partakers of His promise in Christ Jesus by the glad tidings" (N.Tn.). This verse speaks of "heirs"; of a "body", and of God’s "promise in Christ." Here we may well pause and enquire, What is the inheritance, of which Jewish and Gentile believers are "joint-heirs? What is this "body" of which they form a "joint body"? What is the "promise" in which they are joint partakers?

First, as to the inheritance. It will be remembered that the Apostle Paul was sent to the Gentiles to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God that they might receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith in Christ (Acts 26:17-18). Writing to these Gentile believers at Ephesus, he reminds them, in the first chapter, that they have the forgiveness of sins through the riches of God’s grace, and that in Christ they have obtained an inheritance (Ephesians 1:7; Ephesians 1:11). Moreover, the Apostle definitely tells us what this inheritance is. He tells us that in the fulness of times — the Millennial day — all things which are "in heaven" and "in earth" will be headed up in Christ. The mystery tells us that in this vast inheritance, over things heavenly and earthly, believers from Jews and Gentiles are made joint heirs. Further, we have the Holy Spirit who is "the earnest of our inheritance" that we may enter even now into the blessedness of this inheritance (Ephesians 1:14).

Then the Apostle prays that we may know the riches of the glory of the inheritance (Ephesians 1:18). In order to this he directs our thoughts to Christ. We see Christ set in the place of supreme power, at the right hand of God. We see Him set far above every spiritual power — "all principality and power," far above every temporal power — "might and dominion." We see that He has a name above every name that is named whether in this world or the world to come, and we see all things

put under His feet. As we look at Christ in the glory our eyes are enlightened to see the riches of the glory of the inheritance which, as joint heirs, we are going to share with Christ.

Thus, it will be seen, that the inheritance unfolded in the mystery far transcends the earthly inheritance promised to Abraham and the nation of Israel. The second great truth as to the Mystery views the church as the body of Christ. Of this body Christ in heaven is the glorious Head. Thus the Apostle can say of Christ, "He is the Head of the body the church," and of the church, "Ye are the body of Christ." Further, we learn that "by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body whether we be Jew or Gentile" (Colossians 1:18; 1 Corinthians 12:13; 1 Corinthians 12:27). In connection with the church viewed as the body of Christ three great truths come before us. First, we read that God "hath made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Believers from Jews and Gentiles are united together and represented in Christ their risen and exalted Head in heaven. All that God has purposed for us is set forth in Christ in heaven. As we look at Christ in glory we see that God has purposed to have the church in His own abode, in heavenly places, with Christ and like Christ for His own satisfaction and delight, so that "in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." Secondly, the church viewed as the body of Christ is said to be "the fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (Ephesians 1:22-23). Not only are all the blessings of the body set forth in the Head, but it is also God’s purpose that all the moral perfections and loveliness of Christ, the Head, should be set forth in the church, His body. In the day to come Israel and the nations will come into blessing through Christ, but in the church alone will Christ be fully displayed. Thirdly, the church as the body of Christ is viewed, in the First Epistle to the Corinthians as that in which, at the present time, all the manifestations of the Spirit are seen (1 Corinthians 12:1-31). The third great truth of the mystery as brought before us in this passage is connected with the promises of God. These promises, as the Apostle Peter reminds us, are "exceeding great and precious" for by them we are called to glory and partake of the divine nature. Further, "we according to His promise look for new heavens and a new earth (2 Peter 1:3-4; 2 Peter 3:13). The Apostle Paul tells us that in the mystery we learn that believers from Jews and Gentiles are joint partakers of these promises in Christ. It will be thus seen that God’s "promise in Christ" far transcends the promises of God to Abraham, to whom God said. "I will make of thee a great nation . . . and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 12:2-3). Thus the promise to Abraham is national and earthly and views the Gentiles as entirely distinct from Israel.

Alas! the Christian profession having lost the truth of the mystery has attempted to use Christianity to form so-called Christian nations and to make our blessing earthly, thus turning Christianity into a merely moral system for the improvement of a world that has rejected Christ. By the great truth of the mystery we learn that believers are called out of the world to be pilgrims and strangers on earth, with promises that connect them with Christ in glory, that are heavenly and not earthly, and that carry us beyond time into the new heavens and new earth.

Thus, through this great truth of the mystery we learn that believers from Jews and Gentiles are connected with the highest Millennial glories as joint heirs; are taken into heaven itself as a joint body, and are carried into the new heavens and new earth as joint partakers of God’s promise in Christ. As the immensity of these blessings rise before our souls we begin to understand why in this mystery there are found "the unsearchable riches of The Christ," and why the Apostle speaks of "the riches of the glory of this mystery" (Ephesians 3:8; Colossians 1:27).

(Ephesians 3:7). Having been made the minister of this great truth, the Apostle now tells us that to carry out such a ministry needs the grace of God and the power of God. If in our little measure we are to pass on these great truths ministered by the Apostle, we then shall surely need divine grace and divine power. Thus, in another Epistle the Apostle can charge Timothy to "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" in order that he may commit to others these great truths that he had heard from the Apostle. Nature could never discover the truth of the mystery, and when revealed, nature could not apprehend the truth, and when apprehended, mere natural ability is not sufficient to minister the truth. The grace of God reveals the mystery; by the work of the Spirit in us the truth revealed can alone be apprehended, and by the grace of God it alone can be ministered (Verses 2 and 3, 7, 16-18).

(Ephesians 3:8). Further the Apostle lets us know the effect of this great truth on the one by whom it is known and ministered. The more we realise the immensity of the unsearchable riches of Christ made known in the mystery the more we shall realise our own insignificance. Thus, the Apostle who, above all others, entered into the greatness of the mystery is the one who can speak of himself as "less than the least of all saints." And the one who has some sense of his own littleness is the one to whom God gives grace to minister the truth. Thus, though the Apostle was the least of all saints, yet to him was grace given that he should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.

(Ephesians 3:9; Ephesians 3:11). Moreover, through the administration, or "stewardship," of the Apostle, God would have us to learn His ways in carrying out the great purposes revealed in the mystery. We are told that this great mystery has been hid in God from the beginning of the world. The mystery was no after-thought with God. It existed in the counsels of God before time and creation. Indeed all things were created to bring to light this great mystery. Counselled in eternity the church is formed in time to be for the glory of God in Christ in the eternal ages yet to come. In the formation of the church in time and in its passage through this world, all the principalities and powers in heavenly places are to learn the manifold wisdom of God — the wisdom whereby out of a wrecked and ruined world God triumphs over every power of evil and carries out His eternal purpose in Christ Jesus to have the church for His eternal glory by Christ Jesus. This then is the mystery about which the Apostle, in his day, had such great conflict in order that the saints might apprehend it in the full assurance of understanding. This is the mystery which for long centuries has been lost to the professing church. This is the mystery which has been recovered to us in these last days, and of which the devil is again seeking to rob us, either by wholly neglecting it, or by adopting practices wholly inconsistent with it, or by leading us into associations in which it is impossible to walk in the light of it. Well then for us to pray the prayer of the Apostle, with which the chapter closes, so that our "hearts may be encouraged, being united together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the full knowledge of the mystery of God."

H. Smith.

S. The Second Epistle to the Thessalonians

The Second Epistle to the Thessalonians. An Expository Outline.

Introductory. The two Epistles to the Assembly of the Thessalonians were written to meet errors that had arisen in their midst as to the Christian’s hope — the coming of the Lord.

Scripture presents this great truth in a double aspect. There is first the coming of the Lord for His saints to take them out of this world to be with Himself in the glory: secondly, there is His coming with His saints to bring them into the world to reign with Him. The First Epistle presents the coining of the Lord to take His saints out of the world, and corrects the error that had arisen as to the saints who had fallen asleep. The Second Epistle presents the coming of Christ with His saints and corrects errors that were being taught as to the saints still living. The Thessalonian Assembly was well aware that the coming of the Lord with His saints would end man’s day and usher in the day of the Lord. Already the Apostle had referred to "the day of the Lord" in the First Epistle (5: 2) as a truth with which they were well acquainted; and again he takes up this great theme in this Second Epistle (see Chapter 2:2, where "the day of Christ" should be translated "the day of the Lord").

These believers would know that the prophets spoke of this day as "The great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Malachi 4:5); "a day of trouble, and distress, a day of wasteness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness" (Zephaniah 1:14-15). Thus, however great the glory and blessing of the reign of Christ, the day of the Lord, that leads to the Kingdom, would be ushered in by overwhelming judgments on the world.

It would seem that the enemy took occasion, by the persecutions and tribulations that the Thessalonian believers were passing through, to raise the terrible thought in their minds that the day of the Lord was present, and that the believers would have to pass through the horrors of this day before being taken to be with the Lord. The Apostle writes this Epistle to correct this error, not only for the Thessalonian Assembly but for all God’s people who still think that the Church must pass through the great tribulation before the Lord comes to receive His own to Himself. Moreover, as ever, the Spirit of God, when correcting error, also unfolds solemn and precious truths for the warning, comfort, and establishment of believers. The contents of the Epistle may be summarised as follows:

First, the Apostle comforts believers in the midst of persecution, and fortifies them against being deceived with error, by instructing them in the truth (2 Thessalonians 1:1-12).

Secondly, having instructed them in the truth he exposes the error and foretells the apostacy of Christendom and the manifestation of the man of sin (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12).

Thirdly, he comforts believers by reminding them of their present portion and their future prospect in contrast to the coming doom of Christendom (2 Thessalonians 2:13-17).

Finally, he instructs us as to the practical walk that is consistent with the coming of Christ (Chapter 3).

1. Comfort in Persecution.

2 Thessalonians 1:1-12. The Assembly of the Thessalonians were troubled and distracted by some evilly disposed persons who took occasion by the persecutions they were suffering to teach the error that the day of the Lord had already come. Before, however, exposing the error, the Apostle, after the salutation (Vv. 1, 2), gives thanks for the spiritual condition of these believers (3, 4), comforts them by presenting the truth as to the day of the Lord (5-10), and encourages by his prayer on their behalf (11, 12). The Salutation (2 Thessalonians 1:1-2). The Apostle addresses the Assembly of the Thessalonians as being "in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." He recognises that they are in the enjoyment of the full truth of Christianity that reveals God as our Father and Jesus Christ as our Lord. So the Apostle can write to the Corinthian Assembly, "To us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by Him" (1 Corinthians 8:6). He desires for these saints grace to endure in their persecutions, and peace to garrison their hearts in spite of their tribulations.

Thanksgiving on their behalf (2 Thessalonians 1:3-4). The spiritual condition of this Assembly was such that it was meet that the Apostle should thank God on their behalf. There may be ignorance that calls for instruction, error, that requires correction, and even individuals whose walk is disorderly, but, as ever, the Apostle delights to recognise what is of God in His people before dealing with their ignorance and failure.

It is noteworthy that the Apostle gives thanks for the fruit of the work of God in the saints — their "faith" and "love." He does not, in this passage, thank God for the knowledge of the truth they may have acquired or for their diligence in searching the word, but for the results of the truth seen in their lives. Even so, in writing to the Ephesian believers, he does not thank God that they entered into the highest truths connected with the counsels of God, but he thanks God for the measure in which the truth had affected them, as witnessed by their "faith in the Lord Jesus" and "love unto all the saints" (Ephesians 1:15-16; also Colossians 1:3-4).

Very blessedly the Assembly was characterised, not only by faith toward our Lord Jesus, but by faith that was growing exceedingly; and not only by love to one another, but by love that was abounding. Moreover it was not only that there were devoted individuals in their midst but the Apostle speaks of "the love of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth."

There was then, in these Thessalonian believers, a very blessed witness to what the Assembly should be according to the mind of God — a company of people to whom Christ was the one Object of their faith, and where divine love prevailed. In such a company there would be no room for the pettiness of the flesh with its love of self-exaltation, its jealousy and its malice. In such a company confidence in one another would abound, every one’s reputation would be safe, and all would seek the good of others. The Apostle says nothing, in these introductory verses, of their hope, as in the first Epistle. Probably their hope had become a little dimmed by the false report that the day of the Lord was already present. The effect of this Epistle would be to revive their hope so that later he can close the corrective part of his Epistle by reminding them of the

"everlasting consolation and good hope" given to us "through grace" (2:16).

(2 Thessalonians 1:4). An Assembly where faith was growing and love abounding would not, either in that day or this, escape the attacks of Satan. So we learn they were passing through persecutions and tribulations. Nevertheless God allowed these trials for the testing of their faith, for the proving of faith "works endurance" (James 1:3). With the Thessalonian believers the efforts of Satan had only been a means of drawing out their faith in Christ, their love to one another, and their endurance in trial. Such qualities called forth the thankfulness of the Apostle to God and enabled him to glory on their behalf in other Assemblies.

Every effort of the enemy is to weaken faith in Christ, to break up love between one another, and to lead us to resent evil rather than patiently endure. In the midst of the special trials of the closing days we may not, in this country, have to meet active persecution; none the less we shall have tribulation. In a day of confusion and scattering among the people of God the trials we have to meet are more often from the flesh showing itself, in different forms, within the circle of God's people rather than from opposition from without. Such trials are allowed of God in order to work endurance. Alas! too often we miss the lesson God would teach us by resenting the trial and rendering evil for evil, and railing for railing. In such circumstances the trial may be allowed to continue, or, if removed we miss the blessing that God intended, and shall have to go through yet further trials. Good for us if we take every trial from God, and to God. Then, having committed all to God we shall learn "endurance" which carries with it great blessing for our souls even now, and, in the day to come, a bright reward in glory. The Kingdom of God and the Day of the Lord (2 Thessalonians 1:5-10). The reference to the persecutions and tribulations that these saints were passing through, naturally leads the Apostle to speak of the Kingdom of God and the day of the Lord by which the Kingdom will be introduced, and thus prepare these saints to detect- and refuse the error by which they were being troubled and of which the Apostle speaks in the second chapter.

(2 Thessalonians 1:5). First we learn that the coining Kingdom will make manifest the righteous judgment of God in allowing His people to pass through persecution and tribulation. The beautiful traits these believers were exhibiting in the midst of persecution and trials, proved them to be worthy of a place in the coming glory of the Kingdom. It was the maintenance of the principles of the Kingdom that brought them into suffering, and the suffering was allowed in view of the rewards and glories of the Kingdom.

(2 Thessalonians 1:6). Secondly, in the coming day, the righteousness of God will also be seen in recompensing tribulation to those who trouble His people. This is a truth of the utmost importance showing, as it does, that we must wait for a future day for the final solution of the righteous government of God. The righteousness of God, whether in rewarding those who do good or in the judgment of those who do evil, is not fully seen in this life, as the friends of Job falsely argued. Now the people of God oftentimes have to endure suffering while the wicked prosper. Nevertheless, in the world to come all will be brought to an issue, and it will be demonstrated before men and angels that God has not been unmindful of the sufferings of His people throughout the ages, nor indifferent to the violence and corruption of their enemies. Every kind of persecution and trial whether from pagan Rome or papal Rome, whether from within or without the professing Christian circle, will at last be remembered for exposure and judgment. In the light of that day

God’s suffering people need not be indignant with their enemies; they need not seek to take vengeance, or even vindicate themselves: they only have to wait God’s time when all will be dealt with in perfect righteousness.

(2 Thessalonians 1:7). Thirdly, the future day of tribulation for the world, will be the day of "rest" for believers who are troubled in this the day of grace. So the Apostle can say to these tried saints, "rest with us" in that day. One has said, "Now it is the saints that are troubled, then it will be the world. Now the saints suffer at the world’s hands; then the world will be punished by the Lord’s hand."

Fourthly, we learn that the "rest" of the saints and the tribulation of the world will be brought about by the day of the Lord — the day "when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels." At His first coming, in humiliation and grace, the angels announced the glad tidings and a multitude of the heavenly hosts were there to celebrate His praise, and announce blessing to man and glory to God. At His second coming He will be revealed in power, and again the angels of His might will be present, but to execute judgment on a world that has rejected His grace.

(2 Thessalonians 1:8-9). Fifthly, we learn that, in the day of the Lord, divine vengeance will fall on all those who know not God. The nations have the witness of creation through which the eternal power and divinity of God can be known (see Romans 1:19-20; Psalms 19:1-6). They have rejected creation’s testimony, fallen into idolatry, and corrupted themselves with every conceivable lust. All this evil has not been passed over; it will be dealt with in the day of the Lord. Their ignorance of God is an ignorance that has had opportunity of knowledge but rejected it.

Sixthly, there are those who have heard the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ — a much higher testimony than that of creation for therein is revealed the love of God. Such will be dealt with according to the light and privileges they have had. But whether men reject the creation testimony or the gospel testimony it will involve their everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power. They saw no glory in His humiliation in grace that they might be saved; they will know nothing of the glory of the day of His power.

(2 Thessalonians 1:10). Seventhly, above all else, the day of the Lord will be the day of the glory and exaltation of Christ, when He will be "glorified and "admired" in all them that believe.

Prayer for Believers (2 Thessalonians 1:11-12). The Apostle closes the introductory portion of the Epistle with a word of encouragement to these believers by telling them of his prayers on their behalf. He has set before us the rest and the glory of the coming Kingdom to which we are called in association with Christ; now he prays that the saints may be found walking in a way worthy of this high calling. Did we enter more fully into the reality and greatness of this calling — that we are going to be associated with Christ in glory — we should be more entirely separate from this world and its passing glories.

Further, the Apostle prays that God would fulfil in us "all the good pleasure of His goodness." We are not left here to fulfil the pleasure of the flesh. It is our high privilege to be here for the pleasure of God. The Lord, in the perfection of His way, could say, "I do always those things that please Him" (John 8:29). Alas! too often we do the things that please ourselves. In the light of the Lord’s example, and the Apostle’s prayer, we may well challenge ourselves and ask, Are our thoughts,

our words, our ways, our walk, pleasing to God, and according to the pleasure of His goodness? Let us remember that His pleasure can only be good, and for our good.

Moreover, the Apostle desires that "the work of faith" — that which God has given us to do — may be carried out by power given by Him. The power is needed to continue the work of faith. We should like power to deal with our enemies and all that oppose and insult us. This however is the Lord's work who will deal with them by "the glory of His power" when He is revealed (V. 9).

Finally, the Apostle desires that "the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified "in the saints even now. Christ will be glorified in His saints in the day of His glory, but it is the good pleasure of God that the Name of Christ should be glorified in His people in the day of His rejection. The flesh would like to glorify itself, and, in the presence of opposition, and insults, we would like to vindicate our-selves. But our business and our privilege is to think only of what would be for the glory of Christ. His glory demands that we should act as He acted "Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, he threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously." This however calls for great grace, therefore the Apostle closes his prayer by desiring that we may glorify Christ "according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ." We need power for the Lord's work and grace to glorify Christ.

There is thus set before us, in this first portion of the Epistle, a beautiful picture of the moral qualities that God desires to be found in the Assemblies of His people. He would have all such to be marked by growing faith in Christ; by abounding love to one another; by endurance in the midst of trials; by a walk worthy of our calling; by ever seeking His good pleasure; by continuing in the work of faith, and, above all, by a condition that glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ. We know how far we come short of the picture, but at least may we have nothing less than the perfect pattern before our souls.

2.The Doom of Christendom.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12.

(2 Thessalonians 2:1-2). In the second division of the Epistle, the Apostle takes up the special subject that led him to write again to the Thessalonian believers. The enemy, taking occasion by their trials and persecutions, had deceived them into thinking that the day of the Lord was present, and, therefore, believers, before reaching their final blessing, would have to pass through the great tribulation that the day of the Lord will bring upon all the world.

Owing to a defective translation in our Authorised Version, the difficulty that troubled these believers is not very apparent. The statement at the end of verse two, "that the day of Christ is at hand," should, beyond all question, read "that the day of the Lord is present" (see N. Tn. and Rev. Ver.). The fact that the day of the Lord was at hand would be no occasion of trouble to these saints. If, however, the day of the Lord was present, then, instead of being caught away to meet the Lord in the air, according to the truth of the First Epistle, they were apparently left behind to go through the great tribulation. Little wonder they were troubled.

Apparently this error had come to them through false teachers who, were not merely themselves deceived, but were deliberate deceivers, for they had even stooped to forging a letter, as from the Apostle, in order to give this error the appearance of apostolic authority. The Apostle appeals to

these saints not to be "shaken in mind nor troubled" by such errors, whether they come through an evil spirit, by oral teaching, or through a forged letter purporting to come from himself, and bases his appeal on the great fact, already brought before these believers, in the first Epistle, — the fact of "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him." This great event will precede the day of the Lord.

(2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). It is of the first importance to see that Scripture clearly distinguishes between the Lord's descent into the air for His saints, and His later appearing with His saints. It is of the interval, between these two great events, that the chapter speaks, and with which so much prophecy is occupied, whether in the Old Testament, in the Lords own prophetic utterances, or in other prophecies of the New Testament. This period is referred to by our Lord as "the completion of the age" (Matthew 24:3, N. Tn.). It must be remembered that the "end of the age" is not the end of the Christian interval which ends with the rapture. The "end of the age," of which the Lord speaks, is the end of the Jewish age, not the end of the Christian period. It comprises the last unfulfilled week of Daniel's Seventy Weeks. It is, as one has said, "the cut off end of the Jewish age." It is to this age that the day of the Lord belongs. Much confusion would have been saved if the true meaning of the expression "the end" or "completion" of the age had been seen. The false interpretation that it refers to the end of the Christian period has led many "to hunt for dates and calculations of times which have been so fruitful a cause of disappointment to multitudes at various periods" (F.W.G.). This period — the interval between the rapture and the appearing — is one of solemn import in the history of the world. The great outstanding feature of this time will be the development of the evil of man apart from the restraining power of God. For this reason it will of necessity be a short period, for when once God removes all restraint, man's evil will develop with fearful rapidity. This heading up of the lawlessness of man will prepare the way for the appearing of the Lord in judgment. It will make manifest the need of judgment, as well as the righteousness of the Lord in intervening in judgment. The Apostle, in this passage, throws great light on this solemn period. First, he shows that this period cannot commence until the coming of the Lord Jesus for believers, and "our gathering together unto Him." These two events are sufficient to meet and dispose of the error that troubled these saints. But there were other events to take place before the day of the Lord comes. So the Apostle goes on to say, "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come except there come a failing away (or 'apostacy') first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition." Here, then, are two more events that precede the day of the Lord. The "gathering together" of the saints to Christ in heaven, is followed by the apostacy of Christendom on earth; and the apostacy prepares the way for the manifestation of the man of sin. As to the apostacy, we are warned in other Scriptures that as we near this awful day, signs of the coming apostacy will manifest themselves. We read, "the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall apostatise from the faith giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Timothy 4:1-3). While, however, individuals may apostatise, "the apostacy" awaits the removal of the true Christians. This event will be followed by the apostacy of the whole corrupt professing Christendom. Thus the gathering together of the saints to Christ in heaven, is followed by the falling away of professing Christendom on earth. Alas! it is only too evident, how fast Christendom is moving towards the apostacy. Modernism with its rationalism; science, falsely so-called, with its godless and self-confident speculations; superstition, with its childish ritualism, are all preparing men to throw off the outward profession of that of which they have never known the vital reality. The apostacy will prepare the way for the appearance of the

man of sin. Comparison of this Scripture with others, leads to the conclusion that the person spoken of in this passage, as the man of sin, is the Antichrist of whom the Apostle John writes, and the one who is described under the figure of the second beast in Revelation 13:11-18. It is only in the Epistle of John that this wicked person is called the Antichrist. As the Apostle Paul warns us that there will be individual apostates before the great apostacy, so the Apostle John warns us there will be anti-christian teachers before the manifestation of the Antichrist (1 John 2:18). The Antichrist is not to be confused with the blasphemous head of the revived Roman Empire, described under the figure of the first beast in Revelation 13:1-10. The Antichrist will be the vessel of religious energy and opposition to Christ. The revived head of the Roman Empire will be the leader in evil public government. One will wield evil religious power; the other evil secular power. Both powers will be energised by Satan, and both will come to the same fearful end (Revelation 13:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:9; Revelation 19:20). The Apostle John shows that the religious opposition of the Antichrist will have both a Jewish as well as a Christian character. He will deny the christian revelation of the Father and the Son, and deny that Jesus is the Messiah promised to the Jews. The Apostle Paul, in this Epistle, gives further details of the character, and actions, of this terrible man. He is here called the "man of sin," for in this man there will be seen the result of a man being left to do his own will without restraint from God or man. As in the case of Judas, he is called the "son of perdition," for, even as Judas was a traitor in the midst of the favoured band of disciples who companied with the Lord, so this man will arise from the ranks of professing Christians. Both men are doomed to perdition, or utter destruction (John 17:12). As to the activities of this wicked man, they all express religious wickedness, rather than secular mis-government, being impious toward God and seductive toward men. He "opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped." In this man will be expressed all the enmity of the human heart to God which is the effect of sin. Moreover, the man that seeks to dethrone God, is set upon exalting himself. So we read of the man of sin that, he not only opposes God, but, he "exalts himself." So boundless is the pride of man that it would seek to exalt man "above all that is called God, or that is worshipped."

Further, this fearful man defies the God of Israel, for "he himself sitteth in the temple of God," and would seek to eliminate all faith in the one and unseen God, for he shows himself that he is God. One has said, "There is thus concentrated in this man of sin all the power of sin, all the enmity of the human heart to God, all the pride that exalts self, all the defiance of the human heart against every revelation of God, whether in nature, in Judaism, or Christianity. In this person God is excluded from the earth, and man arrogates to himself the place and honour that alone belong to God."

(2 Thessalonians 2:5-8). In the course of his description of the coming Antichrist, the Apostle stops to remind us of what is taking place at the present moment, while the true Christians are still on the earth. First, in the goodness of God, there is that which holds back the revelation of this terrible man of sin. Secondly, though the goodness of God holds back the full manifestation of wickedness, yet the evil, that leads to the apostacy, and the revelation of the man of sin, is already at work. This iniquity was, indeed, at work in Paul’s day, for he has to say, it "doth already work." It has continued working all through the Christian period, though in a secret way, and therefore is called "the mystery of lawlessness." The great restraining power is spoken of as a Person, and One who is present upon the earth, but who will soon be gone, so we read, "He who now restrains

until He be gone" (N. Tn.). There is only One to whom this can refer — the Holy Spirit. It is not merely the presence of true Christians that hinders the full development of evil, however much the Holy Spirit may use such in restraining power, but it is rather the presence of a Divine Person who restrains the power of Satan.

Thus the mystery of lawlessness, though not set aside, is at present restrained, a truth that gives great comfort, and confidence, to the Christian. When the Holy Spirit is gone, the restraint will be removed, and the mystery of lawlessness will stand revealed in the lawless one (N. Tn.). The consummation of evil in this man of sin will call forth the righteous judgment of God. The Lord Jesus, the One to whom Antichrist is in deadly opposition, will consume this wicked man with "the spirit of his mouth." This, surely, is the "sharp sword" that proceeds out of His mouth of which we read in the Revelation, and doubtless symbolizes the word of God applied in judgment. This sword of judgment will be wielded by the Lord Jesus at the "appearing of His coming" (N. Tn.). It is well to note the difference that Scripture makes between the coming of the Lord for His saints, and His coining in judgment. When the Apostle speaks of believers "gathering together unto Him," His coming or presence is named, but not a word about His appearing (verse 1). When the lawless one is dealt with in judgment it will be not merely at the coming of the Lord, but at His appearing. He can, and will, come for His saints without appearing to the world. When He comes in judgment, He will appear before all the world. As one has said, "The distinction therefore of 2 Thessalonians 2:1; 2 Thessalonians 2:8 (the presence of Christ simply, and the appearing of His presence) is precise, instructive, and undeniable. The one is to gather together the saints to Christ above: the other is for Him (and we may say for all His saints thus gathered to appear with Him) to crush His enemies. It is then that every eye shall see Him, as it concerns every soul on earth" (W. K.).

(2 Thessalonians 2:9). Having instructed us as to the power that restrains the full development of this fearful evil, the Apostle concludes his description of this lawless one by foretelling the seductive power he will wield, and its terrible effects upon those who have rejected the truth. This fearful display of seductive energy will give occasion for the full manifestation of the power of Satan. The coming of this man of sin will be "after the working of Satan with all power, and signs, and lying wonders." This lawless man will act in deadly opposition to Christ, but his seductions will be shown in that he does so by imitating Christ. We read of the Lord Jesus that He was "approved of God . . . by miracles and wonders and signs" (Acts 2:22). The same words that are used to set forth the power of God, acting in grace, in Christ, are used to set forth the power of Satan, acting in malice, in the man of sin. Thus Antichrist, under the power of Satan, will seek to belittle the witness borne by God to Christ, by miracles and wonders similar to those performed by Christ.

These powers and signs will not be the trickery of some man-made priest, or the sham healings of men; they will be terribly real, though called "lying wonders," inasmuch as they will deceive men. Thus the coining of the lawless one will be accompanied by the supernatural power of Satan. Men forget that there are spiritual beings — "angels that excel in strength," and that Satan, though a fallen angel, has immense powers, far exceeding the powers of man. When the restraining power of God is removed the supernatural powers of Satan will be fully displayed. The working of Satan will be accompanied with the manifestation of "power" far beyond the power of man, with "signs" which convey some portent, and with "wonders" which excite attention.

(2 Thessalonians 2:10-12). The Apostle closes this solemn portion of his Epistle by describing the awful effect of Satan’s power working through the lawless one. All this unrighteousness will deceive "them that perish," those who have heard and refused the truth. "They received not the love of the truth that they might be saved." Having refused the truth they will be given over to this "strong delusion" and will believe a lie. Moreover they "believed not the truth," because they had pleasure in unrighteousness. The whole passage plainly discloses the order of these solemn events.

1. At the present moment evil is secretly working, here called "the mystery of lawlessness."

2. At the coming of Christ for His saints, true believers will be caught away, and the One who restrains will be gone.

3. Following upon the rapture of the saints to Christ in heaven, there will come the apostacy of the christian profession on earth.

4. The apostacy will prepare the way for the revelation of the man of sin.

5. The revelation of the man of sin will become the occasion for the full display of the power of Satan.

6. The display of the power of Satan, through the man of sin, will lead to the strong delusion of those who, finding pleasure in unrighteousness, had rejected the truth.

7. Evil, both in man and Satan, having come to its head in open revolt against God, will be dealt with in overwhelming judgment by the Lord "with the appearing of His coming." In the light of this passage it is clear that so far from the millennial blessing being brought about by the spread of Christianity or the preaching of the gospel, Christendom itself is passing on to judgment. One had said, "It is a remarkable proof of the power of Satan, that in the face of these passages (2 Thessalonians 2:3-12; 2 Timothy 3:1-5; 2 Timothy 3:13; 2 Tim. 4:34) men, wise in their own conceits, will bring reason to prove that they are to go on and fill the whole world with the gospel — that, at the very time that judgments are hastening upon them, men will cherish the expectation of the earth being filled with a widespread blessedness, — is the strongest possible evidence of the power of that delusion of which the Apostle speaks. It is not that God is not working, and turning men from darkness to light. It was the same before the destruction of Jerusalem; three thousand were converted in a day. If we had three thousand converted in a day now, would it be a proof that the millennium was coming? No, but rather that it was judgment that was coming. It was because the judgment was coming that this happened. It was the Lord’s gathering out His saints before the judgment, and adding to the Church such as should be saved. And, if He is now working in a special manner to gather out souls, it is not because the gospel is to fill the world, but because judgment is coming upon the professing Church" (J. N. D. Col. Wri. 11:448).

3.The Portion and Prospect of the Believer.

2 Thessalonians 2:13-17.

Having dealt with the error which had been a cause of agitation to the Thessalonian believers, and foretold the coming doom of Christendom, the Apostle, by way of contrast, speaks of the present and future portion of believers. In the first part of the Epistle he had thanked God for these saints,

instructed them, and prayed for them; so, again, he resorts to thanksgiving, exhortation, and prayer. The Thanksgiving (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). In the opening verses of the Epistle the Apostle thanks God for the saints because of the graces found in them for God. Here he gives thanks because of all that God is for them. Very happily, he speaks of believers as "Brethren, beloved of the Lord." However much the failure and weakness among the people of God, and whatever differences there may be in spiritual attainment, he delights to view them as being bound together as "brethren." Seven times, in the course of this short Epistle, the Apostle addresses these saints as "brethren" (1:3; 2:1, 13, 15; 3:1, 6, 13). Moreover, though persecuted and tried by the world, they are "beloved of the Lord." Should we not be more careful of the way we think of, speak about, and act towards, one another, if we remembered that we are "beloved of the Lord?" Can the Lord be indifferent to any persecution, or insults, suffered by those who are beloved of Him, from whatever quarter such suffering may come?

Then the Apostle thanks God for all that God is for His people, whether in the past, the present, or the future. First, looking back into eternity, he says, "from the beginning" God has chosen us unto salvation. Left to ourselves we should have passed on with the world to the judgment of which he has been speaking; but the sovereign grace of God has chosen us to salvation. This salvation has not been brought about by any works that we have done; but through the work of the Spirit in us, separating us from the world, and leading us to believe the truth. That truth, we know, is the gospel concerning our Lord Jesus Christ, who, in order that we might obtain salvation, died for us (1 Thessalonians 5:9-10). The Apostle thus draws a contrast between believers and unbelievers, of whose doom he has previously spoken. Unbelievers, wrought upon by Satan, received not the love of the truth, and come under condemnation. Believers wrought upon by the Holy Spirit, believe the truth and obtain salvation.

Secondly, if believers were chosen in a past eternity, they are called in time, and the call reached them by the gospel which Paul speaks of as "our gospel." We often confine the gospel to the preaching of the forgiveness of sins; but Paul’s gospel not only proclaimed the salvation that meets our need, but also the calling that meets the need in the heart of God; for if God calls us it is in order to gratify the purposes of love in His own heart. The call of God has a twofold character. It calls us out of this present world, and it calls us to another world. When the God of glory appeared to Abraham, the word was, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I will show thee" (Acts 7:3). We, too, are called out from this present world in view of a heavenly home. For us the world is the world of corrupt Christendom — a mixture of Judaism and Christianity — therefore the call to us is "Go forth therefore unto Him without the camp." Having gone forth we immediately find that "Here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come" (Hebrews 13:13-14).

If then we were chosen in eternity, and called in time, it is in view of "the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ," throughout the coming ages. Wonderful grace! If God calls us, it is with no less purpose than the obtaining of the glory set forth in our Lord Jesus Christ as Man. We are to be like Him and with Him. Again, we may say, how differently we should speak of, and act towards one another, did we view the Lord’s people as "chosen," "called," and going on to glory, The Exhortation (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

Seeing then that we are brethren, beloved of the Lord, chosen, and called, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Apostle exhorts us to "stand firm," and "hold fast" (N. Tn.). Again, be it noted, that it is as "brethren" these exhortations are pressed upon us. It is only as we walk together, united as brethren, that we shall be able to "stand firm" and "hold fast" in any collective sense. If, like the Galatian Assemblies, we "bite and devour one another," it will end in our being "consumed one of another." But, says the Apostle to the Galatians,

"If," in contrast to biting one another, "we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit." Then, indeed, we shall not be "desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another," but we shall walk as brethren, "bearing one another's burdens" (Galatians 5:15; Galatians 5:25-26; Galatians 6:1-2).

Walking as brethren we shall be able to "stand firm" in the presence of the assaults of the enemy, whether by persecution or tribulation. Moreover we shall be able to "hold fast" the instructions of the Apostle (N. Tn.). For the Thessalonians, these instructions came either by word or by letter; for us they are preserved in the Epistles. Every effort of the enemy today, is to lead the saints to "give way" in the presence of trial, and "let go" the truths we have been taught. The Prayer (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17). The Apostle has brought before us the salvation and calling of God, he has exhorted us to "stand firm" and to "hold fast;" but He realises that, if we are to enter into the calling, and stand firm in the presence of all the power of the enemy, it will not be possible in our own strength. Thus it is he resorts to prayer. He turns to our Lord Jesus Christ, Himself, the One who is going to deal with all evil and annul every opposing power by the appearing of His coming. How good that we have access by prayer to "Himself!" Further he turns to "God even our Father" — One who loves us, has chosen us, called us, and given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace.

There may be many sorrows to meet on the road, but there is "everlasting consolation" at the end of the journey. We may have to pass through difficult times, but we are passing on to the fulfilment of the "good hope." False teachers may seek to distress and distract the saints, but the Lord Jesus Christ, Himself, and God our Father can minister comfort. The enemy may seek to turn the saints from their service of "good works and words," but, in spite of every attack of the enemy, whether from false teachers within the Christian profession, or from persecution without, God can enable the saints to "stand firm," to "hold fast," and to continue in every good work and word.

4.The Practical Walk of the People of God.

2 Thessalonians 3:1-18. In the closing portion of the Epistle, the Apostle instructs us as to the practical walk that should mark the Christian Assembly in the presence of opposition from without (1-5), and in view of difficulties that may arise within the circle of fellowship (6-18).

Instructions as to meeting opposition from without the Christian circle (1-5).

(2 Thessalonians 3:1-2). In order that we may meet the opposition of wicked men, and resist the evil of the world we are passing through, the Apostle presents the practical Christian qualities which, if found among believers would enable them to "stand firm" in the face of opposition.

First. Paul speaks of prayer. If we are to "stand firm" in the face of opposition, and "hold fast" the instructions given by him (2:15, N.Tn.), it will only be by grace supplied from the Lord Jesus Christ

Himself, and God, even our Father. On our side, we receive this grace through prayer by which we draw near to the Throne of grace to receive grace in the time of need. In prayer we express our weakness and dependence upon God, and acknowledge our confidence in His power and grace.

Already, the Apostle has twice spoken of his prayers for these saints (1:11, 12; 2:16, 17): now he desires their prayers on his behalf. Though an Apostle, and one who received revelations, and could speak by inspiration, he felt the need of prayer, and was conscious of the value of the prayers of God's people. He thus views the people of God as a praying company to whom he can appeal. The particular request that he desires brings out another mark that should characterise the Christian company. They should be a company of believers in whom the word of the Lord is glorified. The Apostle gladly admits that the Gospel was glorified in these saints, but realising the opposition of the world, and that he, himself, was a very special object of the attacks of unreasonable and wicked men, he desires their prayers that he may be delivered from such. He personifies the gospel and views it as actively pursuing its course. Where the gospel is received, and fruits produced, and lives are changed, as in the case of the Thessalonian saints, the gospel is indeed glorified. Nevertheless a gospel thus glorified will raise the opposition of wicked men who find in these changed lives a condemnation of their own lives.

(2 Thessalonians 3:3). Further, in order that the word of the Lord may be glorified we need to be established in the truth, and Paul is confident that the Lord, in His faithfulness, will establish the saints. Wicked men may oppose, but the Lord is faithful to His own. Our safeguard against error, and every form of evil, is found in being grounded in the truth. If the Lord establishes us in the truth we shall be kept from the evil. Our care then should be to pursue the truth. "I would," says the apostle, in another passage, "have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil" (Romans 16:19).

(2 Thessalonians 3:4). Moreover, the Christian company is to be marked by obedience to the instructions of Scripture. It is true that the Lord alone can establish us in the truth and keep us from evil; nevertheless, on our side there is to be the readiness to obey; as the Apostle can say, "We have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we enjoin you." We may thank the Lord when His people do obey, but only deep confidence in the Lord will enable us to say that they "will do," and thus continue to obey. We need not only present obedience, but continuance in obedience come what may. Good for us to be found amongst those who "both do and will do."

(2 Thessalonians 3:5). Further, the Apostle says. "The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God." The One through whom, at such a cost, all the love of God has been fully revealed, is the One who alone can direct our hearts into that love. In the woman by the well we see not only the way in which the Lord declares the love of God to a sinner, but, also, the tender way He takes to direct her heart into that love.

Finally, the Apostle desires that we may be led "into the patience of the Christ" (N. Tn.). Christ is waiting to receive His saints at the rapture, and to reign with His saints at His appearing. He would have our hearts marked by that same patience.

Thus the Apostle passes before us some of the marks that God would have to be found in every Christian company. They should be a praying people, in whom the word of the Lord is glorified; a

people established in the truth and separate from evil; a company obedient to the word, walking in the love of God, and patiently waiting for the coming of Christ. A company thus characterised would be able to withstand the assaults of the enemy and the temptations of the world.

Instructions as to meeting disorder within the Christian circle.

(2 Thessalonians 3:6-18). Having instructed us as to the Christian qualities that will enable believers to stand against wicked men, and the evil of a hostile world, the Apostle passes on to instruct us how to deal with disorder that may arise within the Christian circle.

(2 Thessalonians 3:6). There were, at that day, as so often since, some in the Christian company who walked in a disorderly way," and not after the instruction "received from the Apostle."

We are solemnly enjoined, in the Name of the Lord Jesus; how to act towards such. In the first Epistle he had instructed the Assembly that, if there were unruly people in their midst they were to be warned (1 Thessalonians 5:14). Here he carries his instructions a stage further. If the warning had no effect, those composing the Assembly were to "withdraw" from the disorderly brother. His disorder is to be judged by the instructions of the Apostle.

(2 Thessalonians 3:7-9). Paul reminds these saints of his own life in their midst as an example of one who walked in an orderly way. His manner of life was the practical expression of his own instructions. In order that he might be an ensample to the simplest Christian, he refused to take any temporal help from these believers. He had "the right" (N. Tn.), as a servant of the Lord, to receive temporal help (1 Corinthians 9:7-14). But for their good, he waived the right, and wrought in "toil and hardship" night and day, to meet his own needs. Thus, his life became an ensample for all, and a rebuke to those who would not work. Apparently, if the enemy could not rob these saints of the truth of the Lord’s coming, he sought to beguile them into abusing the truth, by leading some of them to give up their daily work under the plea of the immediate coming of the Lord.

(2 Thessalonians 3:10-11). When present the Apostle had warned them against disorderly practice, and that if any one would not work, neither should he eat. In spite of the example of his life, and the warning of his words, there were some who declined to work and had become mere busybodies in other people’s affairs. They were marked by disorderly walk, refusal to work, and unprofitable talk. From such we are to withdraw. As one has said, "Foolish talkers are maintained by the folly of hearers; and bread eaten without cost must find those ready to pay the cost." Foolish tongues would soon be quiet, if there were no foolish ears to listen.

(2 Thessalonians 3:12). Having instructed the brethren how to act towards the disorderly, the Apostle now makes a direct appeal to such, enjoining them, in the Name of the Lord Jesus, that with quietness they work and eat their own bread.

(2 Thessalonians 3:13). In the presence of disorderly persons we are to beware lest we grow impatient, or weary in well doing. There is the danger that through weariness of constant exercise we either grow indifferent to disorderly persons, or deal harshly with them.

(2 Thessalonians 3:14-15). If a disorderly person persists in disregarding the instructions of the Apostle we are to mark that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet, even so, we are warned against treating him as an enemy; he is to be admonished as a brother. We are to beware of a pharisaical spirit; even, if for a time, we can keep no company with him, we

are still to act in brotherly love.

(2 Thessalonians 3:16). The Apostle finally commits them to the Lord of peace. He can, under the guidance of the Lord, give us instructions, but only the Lord, Himself, can give the saints peace at all times, and in every way. Disorder would make for disruption and conflict in the Christian circle. The Lord of peace would bring into the Christian circle that godly peace which soon He will bring into the Kingdom; and where the peace of the Lord is, there the Lord, Himself, can be. Hence the Apostle closes with the desire that the Lord Himself may be with them all.

(2 Thessalonians 3:17). The Thessalonian assembly had, apparently, been disturbed by a letter professing to come from the Apostle. Hence, in his closing salutation, he tells them they may be assured of the authority of his letters by finding the salutation attached in his own handwriting.

(2 Thessalonians 3:18). He has desired for us peace from the Lord of peace; now he closes with the desire that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ may be with all. If the instructions of the Epistle are to be carried out, it will only be by a company maintained in the peace of the Lord, with the Lord Himself in the midst, and under the constant supply of His grace.

H. Smith. And Saviour! 'tis Thee from on high We await till the time Thou shalt come, To take those Thou hast led by Thine eye To Thyself in Thy heavenly home.

Chapter 82

S. The Secret Place of the Most High.

"The Secret Place of the Most High."

Psalms 91:1-16.

Hamilton Smith.

(Extracted from Scripture Truth Vol. 43, 1968, pages 57-60) To enter into the blessedness of this beautiful Psalm, it is important to notice its structure. The first verse gives us the theme of the Psalm — the blessing of One who dwells in the secret place of the Most High. In the second verse we hear the voice of Jesus, taking this place of secret communion with God. This we know from Hebrews 2:13, where the Apostle Paul quotes the words "In Him will I trust," as being the words of Christ.

Then from verses 3 to 8, have we not the testimony of the Holy Spirit to the blessedness of the One who dwells in the secret place? In the following verses, 9 to 13, we hear the voice of a godly man, — one who can speak of the LORD as "my refuge" bearing his witness to the blessedness of Jesus.

Finally, in verses 14 to 16, the Psalm closes with the witness borne by Jehovah to the blessings that form the portion of the One who sets his love on God and dwells in the secret place.

(Vv. 1, 2) What then are we to understand by "dwelling in the secret place," to which such blessing is attached, as witnessed by every voice in the Psalm? To use our New Testament language, does it not speak of the inner life of secret communion lived with Divine Persons? Is it not this life to which the Lord’s words refer when He says, "If I wash thee not thou hast no part with Me;" and again when He says, "Abide in Me"? Does not the apostle John bring before us this secret life, when he writes, "Our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ"? (John 13:8, John 15:4-7, 1 John 1:3). To have part with Christ, and abide in Him, is to live in communion with Him where He is. To live such a life is to dwell "in the secret place."

It is not the outer life lived before men of which the Psalm speaks, but the inner life lived in secret before God. Further, it is not occasional communion of which the Psalm speaks, but rather the constant experience of the soul, for it speaks of one that "dwelleth in the secret place." We know that there has been only one Man who lived this life of unbroken communion with God — the Man (Christ Jesus, Who, when on earth, could speak of Himself as "the Son of Man which is in heaven" (John 3:13). He walked on earth but lived in heaven. While, the experience of the Psalm is only fully realised in Christ, it, none the less, presents a perfect example for the believer.

All the outward life of Christ on earth, marked by perfect obedience to the Father; grace to sinners; faithfulness in testimony, holiness in walk, combined with meekness, lowliness, gentleness and love, was the outcome of the inner life lived in communion with the Father. With the most spiritual saint such a life will only be in measure, with Him it was lived in absolute perfection. Have we not to own that, too often, we may have been very careful of our outward lives before men, but

careless of the secret life known only to God. Has not all the ruin of the church in responsibility been traced back, by the Lord, Himself, to failure in living this inner life? In the church at Ephesus, while there was much that the Lord approves in their outward zeal and refusal of gross evil, yet He has to say, "Thou art fallen." This fall is traced back to loss of first love. They had broken down in living the secret life of communion with Christ. In the promises to the overcomer in the midst of the church's ruin, Christ is presented both as the Tree of Life in the paradise of God, and as the Hidden Manna. As the Tree of Life we have Christ brought before us in the home above — the Man in the glory — as the Object of our souls. As the Hidden Manna we think of Christ in His path on earth - the lowly Man as our Example. Does not the apostle present Christ as the Tree of Life when he says, "Looking steadfastly on Jesus" Who "is set down at the right hand of the throne of God"? Then, immediately, he reminds us of Christ as the Hidden Manna, when he says, "Consider Him that endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself" (Hebrews 12:2-3 N.Tn.). In this Psalm we are invited to consider Christ as the Hidden Manna — the One who passed through this world as a stranger, amidst trials and dangers, in unbroken communion with God, and thus found in God His "refuge" and "fortress" — a refuge from every storm, and His defence from every enemy.

(Vv. 3-8) Passing on to consider the blessings of the One that walked in secret communion with God, as unfolded by the Spirit, we learn:-

Firstly, that such will be delivered "from the snare of the fowler, and from the destructive pestilence" (N.Tn.). Does not a snare represent evil hidden under a fair exterior? The apostle Paul warns us against being beguiled with "enticing words''' (Colossians 2:4), and tells us that in the professing Christian circle some will be caught "in the snare of the devil" (2 Timothy 2:26). Again the apostle Peter warns us that among the saints there will be found those "who privily shall bring in destructive heresies" (2 Peter 2:1 N.Tn). Was it not a "snare" the Lord had to meet when wicked men sought "to catch Him in his words," by approaching Him with flattery, saying, "Master, we know that thou art true, and caress for no man. . . but teaches" the way of God in truth"? Was it not a "destructive pestilence" He had to meet when the Sadducees sought to argue there is "no resurrection"? In keeping with the secret life set before us in this Psalm, the apostle Peter sets before us the secret life of "godliness" as the way of deliverance from snares and destructive pestilences (see 2 Peter 1:3, 2 Peter 3:11). We may think we can escape snares and be preserved from heresies by our own intelligence and knowledge of the truth. But whatever our knowledge and gifts, unless we are in secret communion — abiding in Christ — there is no snare into which we cannot fall. The Corinthian saints found that though they had all knowledge, it was not sufficient to preserve them from the destructive heresy which denied the resurrection.

Secondly, the one walking in secret communion will be kept from every assault of the enemy by the word of God. Of such it can be said, "His truth shall be thy shield and buckler." Was it not so with the Lord when He met every temptation of Satan with the words, "It is written"? The Lord can say, in the words of another Psalm, "By the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer" (Psalms 17:4). Let us beware of seeking to meet the attacks of the devil by human argument. Error can only be met by truth. But to rightly use the truth we need to be living in secret communion.

Thirdly, of the one living this life of secret communion, it can be said, "Thou shalt not be afraid." We live in a world of terrors by night, and dangers by day. A world in which there is lurking evil and wasting destruction. Though we may have to face these things on every side — as the word says, "at thy side," and "at thy right hand," yet, if walking in secret communion we shall "not be afraid." We shall be preserved in the trial, and in due course see the governmental judgment of God upon the wicked.

(Vv. 9-13) Furthermore we are reminded, by the witness borne by a godly man, that the One who dwells in the secret place of communion — Who makes "the LORD . . . even the Most High" His "habitation," will pass through the world under the escort of angelic beings, and overcome every wicked spirit. At every stage of the pathway of the Lord we are permitted to see the attendant angels. An angel announced His birth to simple shepherds, and a multitude of the heavenly host united to tell His praise (Luke 2:8-14). In the wilderness, when tempted by Satan, "the angels ministered unto Him" (Mark 1:13). In the agony of Gethsemane "there appeared an angel unto Him from heaven strengthening Him" (Luke 22:43). At His grave the angel of the Lord was on guard (Matthew 28:2). And in that last scene that closed His path on earth, when He was taken up to heaven, two angels were standing by (Acts 1:10). Moreover, of the Lord's people it is still true that the angels are sent forth to minister for those who shall be heirs of salvation. But may we not say, it is the one who follows the Lord's example, and walks in secret communion with Christ that will have the consciousness of divine protection and overcome the power of the devil whether it be in his might as a roaring "lion" seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:9); or in subtle craft as the serpent (2 Corinthians 11:3); or as the persecuting dragon (Revelation 12:3)? We thus learn by the perfect example of Christ that, if walking through this world with all its dangers and terrors, in constant communion with God, earthly evils will not overcome us, Heavenly hosts will wait upon us, and Hell's forces be subdued beneath us.

(Vv. 14-16) Finally, we are privileged to hear the witness of God, Himself, to the blessedness of the One who walked through this world in a life of unbroken communion flowing from love to God. In Christ God has at last found a Man in wilderness circumstances of Whom He can say, "He hath set his love upon Me"; "He hath known my Name"; "He shall call upon Me." In this perfect Man, God can find all His delight, and to His perfections God can give a perfect answer, as He says "I will" bless Him. When God says "I will," who can gainsay? So we hear God saying of Christ:- "I will deliver Him" from every snare;

"I will set Him on high," above every power;

"I will answer Him," when He calls upon Me;

"I will be with Him," in trouble;

"I will deliver Him, and honour Him;

I will satisfy Him with length of days in glory I will "show Him my salvation" in the coming kingdom. When once His word is passed, When He hath said "I will": That thing shall come at last, God keeps His promise still.

Such then is the blessedness that flows from "dwelling in the secret place" and thus living the inner life of communion. If, in any measure we are to fallow the perfect example of the Lord, as set forth

in this Psalm, we must be ready to put our feet into His hands that everything in our thoughts and words, walk and ways, that would hinder communion may be judged and dealt with by the washing of water of the word. May we hear His voice as He says "Abide in Me," and respond in the words of the disciples who said, "Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." Opening the door of our hearts to Him, shall we not know something of the blessedness of His words, when He says, "If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with Me" (Revelation 3:20). Will this not lead to the blessedness of dwelling in the secret place?

Chapter 83

S. The Shepherd Psalm.

The Shepherd Psalm.

Psalms 23:1-6.

Hamilton Smith.

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There are wonderful statements in Psalms 23:1-6, but all flow from the first great statement — the most wonderful of all — "The Lord is my Shepherd."

There are temporal needs at every turn, but "The Lord is my Shepherd"; therefore, "I shall not want" (1).

There are spiritual needs, but "The Lord is my Shepherd"; He will lead me into green pastures, and beside the still waters (2).

There may be failure, but "The Lord is my Shepherd"; He will restore my soul (3).

There may be the valley of the shadow of death to face, but "The Lord is my Shepherd"; I will fear no evil (4),

There may be enemies to meet, but "The Lord is my Shepherd"; a table will be prepared for me in the presence of mine enemies (5).

There is eternity before me, but "The Lord is my Shepherd," and, at last, He will bring me to dwell in the house of the Lord for ever (6).

It is one thing to say "The Lord is the Shepherd," and quite another to say "The Lord is my Shepherd." The first is a matter of knowledge; the last is a question of experience. "The Lord is my Shepherd" is the language of one who has proved the Lord in the varied circumstances of his pathway, and gladly submits to His leading.

First of all we do well to consider the Blesser. The safety, comfort, and blessing of the flock entirely depend upon the care, wisdom and devotedness of the Shepherd. Who is my Shepherd? The LORD — Jehovah. And Jehovah of the Old Testament is Jesus of the New Testament. He is the Man of the twenty-second Psalm, but also the Man of the twenty-fourth Psalm. In the twenty-second, He is the forsaken Man, in the twenty-fourth, He is the accepted Man. In the twenty-second, "His strength is dried up like a potsherd." In the twenty-fourth, He is "strong and mighty." In the twenty-second, He is "a worm and no man." In the twenty-fourth, He is "the Lord of hosts" and "the King of glory." This is the One who is "my Shepherd." One who has "descended first into the lower parts of the earth." "Who has ascended far above all heavens, that He might fill all things." He has filled every position in which a man can be found, from the utmost distance into which sin can put a man, to the highest glory which God has purposed for a man. He has trodden

every step between these vast extremes, and well He knows the rough places and the solitary way. With such a Shepherd we need fear no evil, nor wonder at any blessing He bestows.

"I shall not want." With such a Shepherd, the Psalmist argues that he cannot want. And yet, if we look at this world with its many wants, and failing supplies, it is no small thing to say, "I shall not want." But with a great Shepherd we can say great things. It has been said, "We shall not want, not because we are sheep, but because He is our Shepherd. This conclusion flows, not from what we are to Him, but from what He is to us."

"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; He leadeth me beside the still waters." Not only does He provide for our temporal needs, but He satisfies us with spiritual blessings. He would set me free from earthly cares to fill my soul with heavenly joys. He not only brings His sheep to green pastures — pastures of tender grass — but there He makes them lie down. No hungry sheep will lie down in green pastures: the hungry sheep will feed in the pastures of tender grass, but the satisfied sheep will lie down and rest. So our Shepherd not only provides us with spiritual nourishment, but He can fill our souls with satisfaction and rest. He that cometh unto Me, shall never hunger."

Moreover, not only does our Shepherd provide nourishment and rest, He also ministers refreshment to our souls. "He leadeth me beside the still waters." Not the running streams that dry up, but the deep, still waters of the well. In Genesis 21:1-34, we read of a poor woman wandering in the wilderness of Beersheba, the water in her bottle spent, weeping beside her dying child; suddenly she heard the angel’s voice, for we read, "God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water." In that dreary wilderness, face to face with death, God led that poor, outcast sheep beside the deep waters of quietness.

Like Israel of old, who forsook "the fountain of living waters and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that could hold no water," we, too, often seek satisfaction in earthly things, only to find that all earthly springs run dry. If only we could trust the Lord not only to save our souls, but to satisfy our hearts, He would lead us into the green pastures that never wither, and beside the still waters that never run dry.

"He restoreth my soul."

Alas! we often turn aside. And after a season of deepest spiritual blessing we are in the greatest danger. We enjoy the green pastures and the still waters and then we wander. In Matthew 26:1-75 we find the world in an uproar: chief priests, scribes and elders, plotting to kill Jesus. But in the upper-room all is quietness and peace. The Lord has been leading His weak and weary sheep into green pastures and beside still waters, as He spoke to them of the Father’s home and His coming to receive them to Himself, and they close that time of sweet fellowship by singing a hymn. But immediately the Lord warns His sheep that, on that same night, all would be offended because of Him, and every one would be scattered. Singing a hymn in His company one hour, and offended and scattered the next. So we read they all "forsook Him and fled." But if they wander, He restores. Peter breaks down and denies the Lord, but he cannot restore himself. The Lord’s prayer for Peter, the Lord’s look upon Peter, the Lord’s private interview with Peter, brought about his restoration. Says restored Naomi, "I went out," but she has to add, "The Lord hath brought me home again."

"He leadeth me in paths of righteousness for His name’s sake."

We wander into paths of sin, but when He restores He leads us into paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. He will lead us so to walk as to glorify His name. His name expresses what He is, it stands for all that is holy even in the sight of His enemies, for they have to own they find no fault in Him. In leading His sheep He makes good that name. He leads in paths of righteousness that accord with His name.

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." The paths of righteousness may lead into the valley of the shadow of death. It was so with the martyrs. They suffered death rather than sin. They resisted unto blood, striving against sin. Why did the Psalmist fear no evil? He gives us four reasons to dispel our fears in the presence of death.

First, he was only going "through" the valley. We do not fear when we go into a tunnel, because we know we do not go in never more to come out. We are going "through" and on the other side is the bright sunshine. The valley indeed is dark, for over it is the shadow of death, but on the other side is the everlasting day — the morning without clouds.

Second, we must not forget it is but the "shadow" of death. When the good Shepherd took His lonely way down into the dark valley of death it was to bear the "substance" of death in all its terror, as the wages of sin. If the believer is called to go through the valley it is only the "shadow" we have to meet. The penalty of death has been paid, the sting of death is gone.

Still, sheep are poor, timid things and easily frightened, even of shadows. Well, there is a third thing to silence our fears. When the good Shepherd took the way of the valley there was no man with Him.

"Alone He bare the cross, Alone its grief sustained." But if we pass the way of the valley we have company, and such company — the One who has already been through death’s dark flood journeys with us. Well may we say, "I will fear no evil; for THOU ART WITH ME." But there is yet a fourth reason why we need fear no evil, for the Psalmist says, "Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." The rod is for defence, and the staff is for support. Does the enemy make a last attack upon the believer as he enters the valley of death? Then let not the believer fear for the Lord is there with His rod to defend His sheep, and drive off the enemy. Is the sheep fearful by reason of his weakness in the presence of death? Let him not be discouraged, for the Lord is there with His staff to support.

"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over."

Some of the sheep may never have to take the way of the valley, but even so, they will have enemies to face, and in the presence of the enemy the Lord can uphold His people. In spite of the enemies, yea, in the very presence of the enemies, the Lord prepares a table for His people. We have a Shepherd who can provide for, and sustain, His sheep in spite of all that man can do, so that we may boldly say, "The Lord is my Helper, and I will not fear what man can do unto me" (Hebrews 13:5-6). But there is more, not only can He sustain me in the presence of mine enemies, but He can make me rejoice, for He anoints my head with oil — "the oil of gladness" (Psalms

45:7). And when the heart is filled with gladness it overflows in praise, like a cup filled to overflowing.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and 1 will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever." With such a Shepherd what other conclusion can we reach? The Lord goes before, the sheep follow after, and goodness and mercy bring up the rear. How blessed that goodness and mercy should follow behind, just, indeed, where they are wanted; for there are weak sheep, and sick sheep, and lame sheep, and the weak and sickly sheep lag behind, and follow afar off, but goodness and mercy will pick them up. How do we deal with the weak and sickly sheep? Alas! too often like the shepherds of Israel, of whom the prophet had to say, "With force and with cruelty have ye ruled them" (Ezekiel 34:4); but with goodness and mercy the Lord deals with them. If we cannot count upon the tender mercies of one another, this at least we know, the goodness and mercy of the Lord will follow us all the days of our life. And when the days of this passing life have run their course, what of the far future that stretches into eternity? The Psalmist closes with an answer of ringing certainty, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." This is the glorious end of a great beginning. For what can be greater, in this world, than to go through it with the Lord Himself for our Shepherd. And if "the Lord is my Shepherd" it must follow that not only He will lead me through this wilderness world, but He will bring me at last into the glory where He Himself is gone.

"For the path where our Saviour has gone, Has led up to His Father and God, To the place where He’s now on the throne, And His strength shall be ours on the road.

Till then, ’tis the path Thou hast trod, Our delight and our comfort shall be;

We’re content with Thy staff and Thy rod, Till with Thee all Thy glory we see."

HAMILTON SMITH.

S. The Single Eye

The Single Eye

Psalms 27:1-14.

Hamilton Smith.

(Extracted from Scripture Truth Vol. 42, 1965-7, pages 283-5) The Twenty-seventh Psalm very blessedly presents the experiences of a believer who, amidst all his trials, looks to the Lord with entire singleness of eye and desire (verse 4).

It opens by giving the experience that finds in the Lord an unfailing resource in the presence of every form of opposition (1-3). We then learn the secret desire of the Psalmist's heart after the Lord (4), and his confidence in the Lord (5, 6). We listen to his prayer to the Lord (7-12); and finally learn how he waits to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living (13, 14). THE LORD THE RESOURCE OF THE GODLY

(Verses 1-3). In all his difficulties and trials, the godly soul finds in the Lord his unfailing resource. The Lord is his "light", his "salvation", and his "strength".

Amidst the prevailing darkness the Lord not only gives light but He is light. The Christian can say that the Lord has trodden the path and met the contradiction of sinners and is the perfect example of the spirit in which opposition is to be met. Moreover, the Lord can deliver, and in the end will deliver from every enemy. In the meantime the Lord is our strength to support us through all the trials of life. With the Lord as his resource, the believer can say, "Of whom shall I be afraid?" We may be opposed by individual enemies, or by a host of enemies, or by "war" — prolonged opposition at every step of the journey. But the heart need not fear nor the soul lose confidence seeing we have the Lord as our light, our salvation, and our strength.

DESIRE AFTER THE LORD

(Verse 4). Behind this confidence in the Lord, there is the earnest desire after the Lord. Above all else the Psalmist desires to live in the constant sense of the presence of the Lord — to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life; to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to learn of Him. In New Testament days we learn that the one thing that the Psalmist desired, is the one thing that Mary chose — to sit at the feet of the Lord and hear His Word.

CONFIDENCE IN THE LORD

(Verses 5, 6). Connected with desires after the Lord there is of necessity confidence in the Lord. If the Lord is my salvation He will hide me from all my enemies. If He is my strength, He will "keep me" in safety (N.T.) firmly established upon a rock; and, in due time, will lift up my head above all my enemies for His own glory and praise. THE PRAYER TO THE LORD

(Verses 7-12). In the prayer we see the exercise of this godly man in the presence of the Lord. In the presence of the enemy he realises the strength of the Lord; in the presence of the Lord he is conscious of his own weakness and sin, for which he fears the anger of the Lord. Nevertheless he learns the evil of his own heart in the presence of the grace that can meet it all, for has not the Lord said to him, "Seek ye my face." Even so in the day of our Lord Peter discovers that he is a sinful man in the presence of the One whose heart is full of grace for a man that is full of sin (Luke 5:8).

Secondly, encouraged to seek the face of the Lord, he prays that the Lord will not hide His face — that he may be kept in the sense of the Lord's favour shining upon him. It is one thing for the Christian to know that he is accepted in the Beloved and stands in the favour of God; it is another thing to walk in the conscious sense of this favour.

Thirdly, realising that the Lord has been his help in times past, he desires that the Lord will not leave nor forsake him in the days to come, even though he may be forsaken by the nearest on earth. Seeing that the Lord has said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," the Christian can "boldly say, The Lord is my helper and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Hebrews 13:5-6).

Fourthly, he desires to be taught the way of the Lord. It is not simply a way that he desires, but, realising that the Lord has His way for His people, through this world, he prays, "Teach me thy way, O Lord."

Fifthly, he realises that there are many enemies that would seek to turn him out of the Lord's way, therefore he desires, not only to be taught the way but, to be led in the way. He says, "Lead me in an even path, because of mine enemies" (N.T.). We need light to see the path, faith to take it, and grace to keep us in it.

Sixthly, realising his own weakness in the presence of his enemies he prays that the Lord would deliver him from the will of enemies, who without conscience witness against him falsely, and without heart breathe out cruelty.

WAITING FOR THE LORD

(Verses 13, 14). Left to himself this godly man would have fainted. What sustained him? Faith in the goodness of the Lord that would bring him into the land of the living. The Christian can say the grace that brings salvation to me on earth will bring me to the glory in heaven. All around we see the evil of man in a world of sin and death, but faith walks in the confidence that very soon we shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. For this we must with quiet patience wait the Lord's own time.

Therefore, the word is, "Wait on the Lord." All that we have to face on the way can be met with "good courage", for the Lord will support us if walking in His way. He will strengthen the heart. So, whether it be for grace in the way, or the final mercy that delivers us from a world of death and brings us into the goodness of the land of the living, let us "Wait on the Lord", with the single eye that leads us to say, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple."

Chapter 85

S. The Son of God

The Son of God His Deity, Incarnation, and Manhood.

Hamilton Smith

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Introduction. From the advent of the Son of God into the world His hands had made, His Person has been the object of unceasing attack by His arch-enemy the devil. Moreover, in the flesh with its unchanging enmity to God, the devil has ever found a ready instrument to wage his warfare against the One who was manifested to destroy the works of the devil. On the other hand, during the long period of the absence of Christ, the Holy Spirit has been the abiding witness to the glory of the Son. Guiding believers into all truth, and showing to them the things of Christ, He has formed them into vessels fitted to express the graces and perfections of Christ. And as "the day goeth away" and "the shadows of the evening are stretched out," as the attacks become more persistent, and the battle grows more fierce, so too it becomes more imperative that every true-hearted saint should give a clear and unequivocal witness to the glories of the Son of God. Love will not be content with any uncertain sound as to the One to whom we owe every blessing for time and eternity. Love will be very jealous of any slight cast upon the fame of One of whom each believer can say "The Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

Discussion upon such a holy theme we should all deprecate. Our spiritual instincts warn us that to discuss His Person is to lose touch with Himself. Who could discuss the Person of Christ in the presence of Christ? So too may we all feel the danger of being drawn into controversy on such a holy theme, even though it be in the honest endeavour to meet and expose error. Does not history, past and present, warn us that too often those who set out to combat one heresy fall into an opposite heresy? The word is "earnestly contend for the faith," though at times it would seem as if we had interpreted this Scripture as an exhortation to earnestly combat error. We are far from saying that we are never to do battle with the wrong; but let us remember in so doing we are occupied with what the mind of man has put forth, and thus are in danger of thinking we can meet the mind of man by the power of our own minds. In contending for the faith we are occupied with what God has revealed, and the very greatness of the truth casts us upon God; and, cast upon Him, we may count upon His support.

While therefore feeling the danger of discussion or controversy we should also feel the constant necessity to contend for the faith. In contending for the truth we must of necessity turn to the Scripture of truth, remembering that it is written, "we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God" (1 Corinthians 2:12). Through dullness of affection we may fail to profit by what is revealed; or

through the activity of our minds we may go beyond what is written. May we then take heed, seeking with quickened affections, and minds controlled by the Spirit to enter more fully into all that has been revealed concerning the Person of the Son without going beyond that which is written. To contemplate the glory of the Son, the wonder of the Incarnation, or the perfection of His Manhood, is to enter a region where human speculation, and our own conjectures, must have no place. In the presence of His glory the very Seraphim fold their wings about their faces, the prophet wraps his mantle about his face, and Moses, the man of God, puts his shoes from off his feet. And though in this day of grace we behold the glory of the Lord with "unveiled face," let it still be with "unshod feet" that we approach the holy mysteries that surround His Person.

Among the many privileges given to the Lord’s people none can be greater than to maintain the glories of the Son amid the lengthening shadows of the approaching apostasy. May we be found faithful stewards of the mysteries of Gad, and strong in that grace which alone will enable us to efface ourselves, make everything of Christ, and "CROWN HIM LORD OF ALL." The Deity of Christ

Everything in Christianity is based on the uncreated existence of the One who created all things. To call in question the Deity of the Son is to undermine the foundation upon which all blessing for man is based. It matters not what elaborate religious systems men may build, or how much they may profess to honour the name of Christ, if they are not building on this foundation all will come to ruin. The absolute Deity of the Son is brought before us in many passages of Scripture, but in none more strikingly than the opening verses of the Gospel of John. This Gospel opens with the sublime statement "In the beginning was the Word." All created things, and every created being in the universe had a beginning, but the Word was in the beginning. At the beginning of all things the Word was there, without any beginning. "In the beginning was the Word," is the formal assertion of the eternal existence of the Word.

Then we are told "the Word was with God." He was a distinct Person in the Godhead, for He was "with God." Furthermore we read "the Word was God." Though distinct in Person He was not different in nature, for He was God — a divine Person.

Then we have the additional statement, "He was in the beginning with God." The mind of man might argue, and indeed has done so, that while it is true the Word is now a distinct Person, yet He was not always so. But this verse rebukes such a thought and tells us plainly that His distinct Personality is as eternal as His deity.

Here then we have the solid foundation of our Christian faith — the glory of the Person of the Son — an eternal Person, a distinct Person, a Divine Person, and an eternally distinct Person.

Many other passages are equally plain in witnessing to the Deity of the Son, but one more direct Scripture may be cited. In Hebrews 1:1-14 the Son is addressed as God. "Unto the Son He saith, Thy throne O God, is for ever and ever." He is worshipped by the Angels; in the beginning He laid the foundations of the earth. He is addressed as the abiding and unchanging God — "Thou remainest" and "Thou art the same."

Scripture thus gives a direct and definite witness to the absolute Deity of the Son. A difficulty may arise, however, in the minds of some, by reason of certain expressions used in connection with the Son, which may be briefly examined: —

First we read of the Son as the only-begotten Son. The expression "only-begotten" might be thought of necessity to imply a birth and a beginning. Faith if unable to meet this difficulty knows full well that Scripture cannot contradict itself, and the clear statements of the opening verses of the Gospel of John forbid any such interpretation. But does Scripture give any light as to the meaning of the expression "Only-begotten" as applied to the Son? It surely does. The expression occurs nine times in the New Testament, and on five of these occasions is applied to the Son (John 1:14, John 1:18; John 3:16, John 3:18; 1 John 4:9). One passage — Hebrews 11:17 — is specially instructive as showing the meaning with which the word is used, There we read "By faith Abraham when he was tried offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son." It is evident that the term ’’only-begotten son" cannot mean that Isaac was the only son begotten of Abraham, for we know that he had other sons. It is equally plain that there was a special relationship between Isaac and Abraham which was unique, and belonged to no other son. It is surely this unique relationship that the term "only-begotten" is used to express. While Scripture makes very plain that there are distinct Persons in the Godhead, it also shows that the Persons of the Godhead are not independent but related. And, as with Abraham and Isaac, so with Divine Persons, the expression "only-begotten" is used to set forth the unique relationship eternally existing between the Son and the Father. "We beheld," says the Apostle, "His glory, a glory as of an only-begotten with a father" (John 1:14. N. Tr.); again we read of "the only-begotten Son in the bosom of the Father" — passages which bring before us the mutuality of divine and eternal affections between the Father and the Son. The Father delighting in the Son as an only-begotten; the Son in the bosom of the Father rejoicing in the Father’s love. Well we know that believers are loved with the same love wherewith the Father loved the Son as Man (John 17:23), but for ever there will be the special affection between Divine Persons — the Father and the Son — which none other will share, and which is set forth in the expression "only-begotten."

Further we have the expression "begotten" used in connection with the Son in Psalms 2:1-12 where we read "Thou art my Son this day have I begotten Thee." This passage is quoted in Acts 13:33; Hebrews 1:5 and Hebrews 5:5. This however presents no difficulty as it plainly refers to Christ as a man, Jehovah’s Anointed and Jehovah’s King, in connection with this world. The expressions used, "the hill of Zion," "the uttermost parts of the earth," and ’’this day," are clearly connected with the earth and time, thus confirming this view.

Lastly we have the word "firstborn," used in connection with Christ, setting forth His pre-eminence in relation to persons, and things, in time, even as "only-begotten" sets forth His eternal relation to His Father before time was.

Beside the positive declarations of the Deity of the Son in the direct Scriptures to which allusion has been made, there are other passages, and other ways, to a few of which we may briefly refer, and which, if in a less positive, yet, perhaps, more moving way, present the Deity of the Son to the affections of His people. The claim to be one with the Father involves His Deity. The Lord can say "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). At once His enemies reply, "Thou being a Man makest Thyself God." The truth indeed is, that He being God became Man, but at least they rightly recognise that One using such words is laying claim to Deity. The claim to equal honours with the Father involves Deity. He can say "The Father . . . hath committed all judgment to the Son, that all should honour the Son even as they honour the Father" (John 5:22-23). The claim to pre-existence involves His Deity. He can say, "Before Abraham was I am." This is truly a claim of

pre-existence, but it is more, for the Lord does not say "I was" but "I AM." This is the consciousness of eternal existence, as well as the claim of pre-existence. This is the language of One who knows no past, and will know no future — the One to Whom time is as if it were not, who has neither beginning nor end — the Eternal I AM. His claim to absolute authority involves His Deity. The prophets open their inspired utterances with a "Thus saith the Lord." They appeal to their hearers on the authority of the Lord. It is otherwise with the sayings of Christ which are introduced with, "Verily I say unto you." He can make no appeal to a higher authority for He is the Lord. The Lord's personal claims involve His Deity. Others bear witness to the dignities of the Lord. He claims them for Himself. David can say "The Lord is my shepherd," but Christ can say, "I am the Good Shepherd." The Baptist can bear witness to the light; the Lord can say "I am the Light." Martha can bear her witness to the resurrection, saying of the dead brother, "I know that he shall rise again;" the Lord can reply, "I am the resurrection and the life." That He was an object for heaven, proclaims His Deity. Others to be blessed must have an object outside themselves; Jesus was the object of heaven instead of having one. Stephen, looking up, finds in Jesus a glorious Object in the heavens to support him in that last sharp passage on his way to glory. But heaven looks down upon Jesus, and the Father's voice declares, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." That He gathers to Himself is a proof of His Deity. He can say, "Come unto Me." It has been truly said, had He not been God this would have been frightful. For one who was only man to use such words would have been the attempt to turn men from God. His words proclaim His Deity. How true is the verdict of the world, "Never man spake like this Man." As we listen to Jesus at the grave side speaking words of tender comfort to broken-hearted women, and then, in a little, we pass to the Upper Room, and listen to the sublime words of the last discourse, that carry our hearts above earth's sorrows into the Father's home, we realize indeed that we are in the presence of the God of whom it is written, "He healeth the broken in heart . . . He telleth the number of the stars" (Psalms 147:3-4).

These are some of the shining ways that witness to us the Divine glory of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Meditating on the Scriptures which, directly or indirectly, speak of His Deity, and entering in some little measure into their deep significance, we shall surely turn to the One of whom they speak, delighting to own, Thou art the everlasting Word, The Father's only Son;

God manifest, God seen and heard, The Heaven's beloved One;

Worthy, O Lamb of God, art Thou That every knee to Thee should bow. The Incarnation. In order to have clearly before us the great truth of the incarnation it will be well to quote the following Scriptures which refer in a direct way to this momentous truth.

"The Word became flesh" — John 1:14.

"God was manifest in the flesh" — 1 Timothy 3:16.

"Who subsisting in the form of God, . . . emptied Himself, taking a bondman's form, taking His place in the likeness of men; and having been found in figure as a man, humbled Himself." — Php 2:5-8.

"Since therefore the children partake of blood and flesh, He also in like manner took part in the same." — Hebrews 2:14.

"Thou hast prepared Me a body." — Hebrews 10:5.

"Jesus Christ come in flesh." — 1 John 4:3.

These passages clearly show that the truth of the incarnation consists in the great fact that a Divine Person — the Son — became flesh. took a bondman's form, took a place in the likeness of men, was found in figure as a man, partook of blood and flesh, and dwelt in the body prepared for Him.

What can exceed the wonder of the incarnation? "God manifest in the flesh." Manifestation supposes a previous existence but a hidden existence; and that the One hitherto hidden comes into manifestation. The One who in His own essential Being dwells "in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen or can see," becomes manifest in flesh — was seen of Angels, while the adoring hearts of his disciples could say "we have heard, we have seen with our eyes, we have looked upon, and our hands have handled the Word of life."

Moreover the way of the incarnation is as marvellous as the fact is wonderful. For we read "Ye shall find the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger" — the divine answer to the cry that went up from a human heart, "Oh that Thou wouldest rend the heavens, that Thou wouldest come down" (Isaiah 64:1-3). God has indeed come down, though not in such fashion as the Prophet desired — like melting fire and boiling water, to make the nations tremble at His presence — He has answered the cry, but in His own way and according to His own heart, a way, indeed, that stills our fears and captivates the heart that is touched by grace and love Divine. Truly has it been said, "nothing in human life makes us so much at home . . . as an infant in its cradle." God has drawn near to us at the lowest point of our weakness, and in the greatest depth of our poverty. He ignored the imperial city of Rome, He passed by the royal city of Jerusalem, and He chose Bethlehem, though "little among the thousands of Judah:" and even so He passed by such poor fare as the village inn could supply and chose the shelter of the oxen's stall. There in Bethlehem's stable the One "whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting," was brought forth and cradled in a manger. The womb of the virgin, the manger of Bethlehem, the arms of Simeon, and the home of Nazareth mark the stages in this wondrous story of the Incarnate Son — God manifest in the flesh.

What, we may ask, was the great purpose of the incarnation? The Scripture that so vividly presents the incarnation, speaks with equal clearness of the purpose of incarnation. Having declared the great fact that "The Word became flesh," the Apostle proceeds to tell us that the One who became incarnate "dwelt among us," and moreover that the One who dwelt among us is the Only-begotten Son, who declares the Father. Here surely we have a bright intimation of the two-fold purpose of incarnation. God dwelling in the midst of men, and God known by men.

If the first step of the fulfilment of this blessed purpose was taken on that great day when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, the last step of the journey will be reached on that yet greater day when, in the new heavens and the new earth the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them. We know indeed that between the beginning and the end of this great journey there must of necessity come the Cross, and the great work of atonement. For man is fallen and guilty, and if God is to dwell with men, it must be with men made suited to God by the work of His own Son — a work which glorifies

God and puts away the sin of man. The incarnation involves the Cross and leads to the glory. And when at last that glory is reached, God will dwell with infinite satisfaction in the midst of a people made infinitely happy in the knowledge of Himself.

Furthermore if the Scriptures unfold to us the wonder and purpose of the incarnation, they are equally careful in guarding the glory of the One who became incarnate. The incarnation has given fallen man the opportunity to express in word and deed the enmity of his heart against his God. The Lord Himself could say, "The reproaches of them that reproached Thee are fallen upon Me" (Psalms 69:9). Such is the hatred of man towards God that he attacks every Person in the Godhead, but by reason of the incarnation the Person of the Son has ever been the special object of man's hostility. Men have seized upon the lowly grace of His Manhood to deny the glories of His Deity, and to call in question His moral perfection. The Scriptures have forestalled the wickedness of men by clearly revealing that the incarnation of the Son implies no change in His glorious Person, and communicates no taint from fallen humanity. As to the glory of His Person. Scripture is careful to show that the Incarnation involves no change in the Person, and no addition to the Person, of the One who became incarnate. He was ever the Son and remains the Son. There was indeed a great change in the "form" which He took, the "likeness" in which He was found and the nature of which He partook, but there was no change as to His Person; Nothing that in grace He became, could add to, or take from, what He was. There was no dual personality in the Son become incarnate. He can say, "I and the Father are one," He never said "I and the Son are one," for He was the Son, and the Manhood that He took conferred upon Him no fresh personality distinct from, or in conjunction with, the Person of the Son. The Person was one and to that nothing could be added by what He became. He comes forth from the Father, sent by the Father, having the very nature of the Father, but was born of a woman, and so partook of human nature, while ever remaining a Divine Person. We do not see two persons united in Christ, as some have falsely taught, but two natures in One Person, which are surely distinct though nevermore to be viewed as separate.

He, by birth, partook of human nature while ever remaining a Divine Person; we, by grace, partake of the divine nature while ever remaining human persons.

Personality, whether human or divine, ever remains the same however much the conditions in which it may be found may vary. A well known servant of the Lord has said, speaking of Christ, "He could say 'I' as God — 'Before Abraham was I am.' And He could say 'I' as man — 'I will put my trust in him.' But these were not two 'I's,' the person was one — 'the Son'". Again referring to Scripture he says, "I read there of a Person — the Word, existing in eternity, Himself the Creator. I read of that same Person become flesh, a man on earth amongst men, a true, real, individual man, but the same blessed Person — God manifest in the flesh, the Son whom God sent in likeness of flesh of sin, God's Son, come of a woman. There is no thought of a change in the Person, the real 'I'. He is always the same, though His 'form' is changed, and the condition in which He has life. When 'He' took part in flesh and blood who was 'He'? Personal identity does not change, though form and condition may.

These are sound and sober words, and to them we may add the testimony of yet another, who, commenting on our Lord's words, "Before Abraham was I AM" very truly remarks, "I AM is the proper expression of His existence. While time rolls on 'I AM' remains unchanged, and when time

has rolled away ’I AM’ subsists the same." This too is a true testimony in accord with the Scripture which declares "THOU REMAINEST" and "THOU ART THE SAME." The same glorious Person whether in the bosom of the Father, the womb of the virgin, or the arms of Simeon; whether in the manger of Bethlehem, the garden of Gethsemane, or on the Cross of Calvary; whether before the foundation of the world, through the ages of time, or when the world shall be no more. "FROM EVERLASTING TO EVERLASTING THOU ART GOD."

Further let us note that though the Creator comes into His own creation, and draws nigh to His creature, yet in so doing He never ceases to be the Creator and Upholder of all things. The manner of the conception in the virgin’s womb cuts off the entail with Adam — the created man. By Divine generation the Babe was formed and grew in the virgin’s womb. It is not said that the body He took was "created," but that it was "prepared." Adam was created, the women was formed from Adam, and Christ was the "seed of the woman." and that by Divine generation. Thus we judge, with jealous care the unholy thought is excluded, that would speak of Christ as a "creature" because He became Man in His own creation. As to His moral perfection. If the glory of the Person who has become incarnate is carefully maintained, so too His Person is jealously guarded from all taint of evil by reason of the incarnation. This is assured to us by the manner of the incarnation as recorded in the gospel of Luke. There we learn that Mary is told that "The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee and the power of the Highest overshadow thee wherefore the Holy thing also which shall be born shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). One has said, "The Holy Ghost should come upon her, should act in "power upon this earthen vessel, without its own will, or the will of any man. Therefore ’that holy thing’ which was born of Mary was called the Son of God. God acting upon Mary . . . was the divine source of His existence on the earth as Man." He was not man innocent, still less man fallen, He was Man holy. "The entail of transmitted sin is in Him cut off by His supernatural birth of a virgin mother." The Manhood of Christ. The inscrutable mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God leads us to contemplate the perfection of the Manhood that He took. In connection with this great theme, we may first ask, "In what does manhood consist?" The Apostle Paul in expressing his closing desire for the Thessalonian saints writes as follows: — "Now the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly: and your whole spirit, and soul and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Here the Apostle desires the sanctification of the whole man, and leaves us in no doubt as to what he means by a complete man: for he is not content to desire that the saints may be sanctified "wholly," but he definitely defines the component parts of a man — spirit, soul, and body. In the light of this passage the conclusion would seem to be irresistible that, according to Scripture, spirit, soul and body, make up a man and, as J. N. Darby has said, "a man is not a man without body, soul, and spirit."*

{*So true is it that a man is composed of spirit, soul and body, that we cannot recall an instance in scripture where the term "man" — meaning a human being — is applied to those who have passed by death into the intermediate state. We read indeed of "the spirits of just men made perfect," and oftentimes, of the bodies of dead men, but neither the body without the spirit and soul, ’’or the spirit and soul without the body are designated by the term "man." 2 Kings 13:21, and Luke 7:12 may appear to be exceptions but are not really so. In the passage in Kings the original word for man is not the word "adam" signifying a "human being," but the word "ish" signifying a man as contrasted with a woman, and is evidently used to designate the sex of the body. In the

passage In Luke it is the only occasion on which the Greek word is translated "man." In the other twelve instances of the use of the word it is translated by the word "dead," It means simply one that is dead.} The above passage agrees with the account we have in Genesis of the creation of man. There we read "Jehovah Elohim formed man, dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Genesis 2:7. N. Tr.). Does this not teach that as to the material part of man — the body — he was formed from the dust of the ground: then, the body having been formed, God communicated life by breathing into his nostrils the breath of life. This surely is the spiritual, or immaterial, part of man which he received direct from God.

"The preacher " in speaking of death also refers to the two parts of man — the material and the spiritual — when he says, "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it" (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Again Elihu refers to the material and the spiritual when speaking of God, he says, "If He set his heart upon man, if He gather unto Himself his spirit and his breath, all flesh shall perish together, and man shall return again unto dust" (Job 34:14-15). This Scripture gives us further light inasmuch as the spirit is linked with the thought of breath, suggesting that the breath of life, in Genesis 2:7, is the spirit of a man.

Thus by the communication of his spirit directly from God, man became a living soul, the body forming the material part, and the spirit and soul the spiritual part of a man.*

{*We need not puzzle ourselves by attempting to draw a hard and fast line between "spirit" and "soul." Together they form the immaterial part of a man and, though for a time, they may be separated from the body at death yet they are not separated from one another, any more than the joints and marrow of the body, or the thoughts and intents of the heart. Yet such is the searching character of the Word of God. that it can distinguish between things so intimately connected that they cannot be separated, (Hebrews 4:12).}

Moreover it is clear that the spirit is the higher part of a man by which he is set in responsibility to God, and being such, may we not say that the spirit of a man is the distinctive and most important part of a man, that which is most necessary to constitute him a man as distinct from the animal creation (See Ecclesiastes 3:21).

If then the Son becomes Man it is surely to become a true Man, spirit, soul and body, for, as Scripture says "in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren" (Hebrews 2:17). But on such a holy theme we are not left to draw our own conclusions, for in Scripture we find every component of man ascribed to the Son as Man. Let us quote some of these Scriptures: — As to the body, the Lord can say, "She hath poured this ointment on my body" — Matthew 26:12.

He refers to "the temple of His body" — John 2:21.

He can say "A body hast Thou prepared Me" — Hebrews 10:5.

Then we read of "The offering of His body'' — Hebrews 10:10.

Again we read, "His own self bare our sins in His own body" — 1 Peter 2:24. As to the spirit (pneuma) we read, He "waxed strong in spirit" — Luke 2:40.

He "perceived in His spirit" — Mark 2:8.

"He sighed deeply in His spirit'' — Mark 8:12.

He "rejoiced in spirit" — Luke 10:21.

"He groaned in the spirit" — John 11:33.

"He was troubled in spirit" — John 13:21.

"He delivered up His spirit" — John 19:30. Again He can say.

"Into Thy hands I commend my spirit" — Luke 23:46. As to the soul (psuche), He can say, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful" — Matthew 26:38.

"Now is my soul troubled" — John 12:27. And it is written "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hades " — Acts 2:27: and again "His soul was not left in Hades" — Acts 2:31.

These then are some of the Scriptures that directly speak of the spirit, soul, and body, in connection with the Manhood of our Lord. There are however other Scriptures which involve body, and spirit, and soul, without using these words, to which we may briefly refer: — As to His spirit — the higher part of man, by which man is constituted an intelligent being in responsibility to God — we read that in childhood, He was "filled with wisdom," and again that He "increased in wisdom" (Luke 2:40, Luke 2:52). Wisdom surely refers to the intelligent spirit of a man. We know too, that "in Him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily"; but here was something very different, for who could connect ''increase" with the "fulness of the Godhead"? This surely is spirit with the characteristics that are proper to the spirit of a man. Again, in His pathway through this world, how constantly the Lord is found in prayer: further, at the last supper He can say, "with desire I have desired to eat this passover:" in the Garden He is seen in an agony of conflict, but submits to the Father's will. Again we ask, Is not prayer, and desire, and conflict, and submission connected with the spirit, and characteristic of the spirit of a man in connection with his God? As to His soul — with which we connect the emotions and affections — we read of the Lord being moved with compassion, weeping over Jerusalem, weeping at the grave, at times moved with indignation, and looking upon His hypocritical opposers with anger. Again we ask, Do not compassion and weeping, indignation and anger express the deep feelings of a human soul? As to His holy body. It is conceived in the womb of the virgin. When born the babe was laid in the manger, circumcised the eighth day; fed at the breasts of a human Mother (Luke 11:27); carried in the arms of Simeon. He grew in body from infancy to youth, and from youth to manhood. We read of the Lord eating and drinking, both before and after the resurrection. He hungers in the wilderness, and thirsts on the Cross. He is weary at the well, and sleeps in the boat.

Birth and growth, eating and drinking, hunger and thirst, weariness and sleep, are essentially connected with the human body and, being presented in connection with the body of the Lord, prove how real was the body He took, and how truly marked by all that is characteristic of the human body, sin apart.

What, we may ask, is the plain force of these Scriptures that, directly or indirectly, refer to spirit, soul, and body, in connection with our Lord's Manhood? What is the impression that they are intended to convey to our minds? What is the truth they teach? Is it not that the perfect Manhood of Christ comprised all three — spirit, soul and body — each possessing all the characteristics that are proper to a perfect Man in a fallen world. Thus, "in all things it behoved Him to be made like

unto His brethren." (Hebrews 2:17).

Furthermore we judge that Scripture distinguishes between "personality" — the conscious "I" — and spirit, soul and body inasmuch as it does not definitely, and much less exclusively, identify personality with any one of the three. We read that "The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets" (1 Corinthians 14:32). We have the verse in the Old Testament which says, "He that ruleth his spirit" (Proverbs 16:32). In connection with the soul, David said, "I humbled my soul" (Psalms 35:13); "I lift up my soul (Psalms 86:4). Solomon speaks of a man destroying his soul and wronging his soul (Proverbs 6:32 and Proverbs 8:36). In reference to the body Paul can say, "I keep under my body" (1 Corinthians 9:27). These and many other Scriptures of a like character, would show that in man there is the union of the material and spiritual under a single personality, as one has said, "Day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute we observe, each within himself, a central authority, directing and controlling, on the one hand, the movements and operations, of an animal frame, and on the other the faculties and efforts of an intelligent spirit, both of which find in this central authority or person their point of unity. How this can be we know not." To this we may add that if death supervenes the "I" is identified with that which is immaterial — the spirit and the soul — yet when in the body, whether now or in the resurrection state, the "I" is surely identified with spirit, soul and body. Is not this distinction between personality and spirit. soul and body equally seen in the utterances of our Lord as Man, (as quoted on page 26), though in the Manhood of Christ, let us ever remember that the Person was Divine — the Son unchanging and unchangeable as to His Person. Though here again, we have to be on our guard, lest by the frailty of human language it might be argued that an impersonal humanity is suggested. Though in Person ever the Son, yet He personally entered into Manhood — spirit, soul, and body, and so really that, as one has said, "there was in Him nothing lacking of all that pertained to perfect manhood — that He was all and felt all that man should be and feel — made in all things like to his brethren" . . . "He was made of a woman, partook of flesh and blood — was truly the woman's seed, and from her derived the nature of a man which placed Him in relation to God and things here as a responsible Man on earth."

"In becoming Man He entered into the reality of the place He took as Man" . . . "The Lord entered into all the conditions of human life, its sensibilities feelings and affections, everything dependent on man's condition and organisation apart from sin." So near, indeed, has He come to His people that Simeon could hold in his arms the One who "hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand," and the beloved Apostle could lean on the bosom of the One who dwells in the bosom of the Father. Here we find ourselves in the presence of One who surpasses the comprehension of our minds, and yet calls forth the worship and adoration of our hearts.

CONCLUSION In writing on this great theme we have sought to follow where Scripture leads, with the desire to learn what is revealed, as well as the meaning of the revelation, concerning God's beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. But while seeking to profit by that which is written, we must never forget there is in the Person of the Son, the Incarnation and the Manhood of Christ. that which for ever will be inscrutable to the finite mind of man. "No man knoweth the Son" is a word we do well to heed. We are only permitted to know divine Persons AS and WHEN revealed.

How a divine Person can come in flesh we do not know. We have to beware of any statement which seeks to make clear to the human mind the inscrutable mystery of the incarnation. Any

statement with this avowed end should at once arouse our suspicion. We may be sure that any such attempt, will not only fail of its purpose but will end in propounding theories that corrupt the truth and dishonour the Son. Our great concern should be to learn what is written, and accept the truth as written, without question and without reasoning. God gives short shrift to the man who questions His revelation, for when in relation to that which is inscrutable man asks "How?" God answers, "Thou fool" (1 Corinthians 15:36). But when proud reason is left behind, simple faith and affection will travel far into depths of glory, "As it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." May it be ours to love, to listen and adore.

S. The Throne.

The Throne.

Revelation 4:1-11.

Amidst the ruin of the Church in responsibility, and the failure of those who have sought to answer to the Lord's mind in a day of ruin, it is an immense comfort that there is a scene to which in faith we can turn where our affections may freely flow out and all our associations be pure and happy. Such a scene we have unrolled before us in chapters 4 and 5 of the Revelation.

Nothing could be darker or more dreary than the last phase of the professing Church as depicted in the close of Revelation 3:1-22. There we find that which professes the Name of Christ on earth boasting in its riches, satisfied with its condition, and yet, not only indifferent to Christ, but actually rejecting Christ, so that Christ is found outside the door. As of old, the nation of Israel sealed its doom by rejecting their Messiah, and their house was left to them desolate so today Christendom is sealing its doom by rejecting Christ, and very soon will be spued out of His mouth. Such is the solemn picture of Revelation 3:1-22, the fulfilment of which we see developing all around us today. In such a condition of things what a relief to the heart to pass in spirit into the scenes depicted in Revelation 4:1-11 and Revelation 5:1-14. In the opening of these chapters we have left earth with its door shut upon Christ to find a door opened into heaven to those who belong to Christ. It is no great hardship to have doors shut in our faces on earth, if there is a door opened to us in heaven, and an invitation to come hither and pass within the door. Passing within we leave behind the scene in which men make nothing of Christ to find ourselves in a scene where Christ is all in all. To understand the Book of Revelation we must remember the threefold division given by the Lord to John as recorded in Revelation 1:19, where the Apostle is told to "Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things that are, and the things that are about to be after these" (N.Tn.). In the vision of Christ we have the first division — the things which John had seen. In the Seven Churches, presenting the whole Church period, we have the second division — "The things that are." From Revelation 4:1-11, and onward, we have the third division, "the things that are about to be after these things" — after the history of the Church on earth is closed.

(Revelation 4:1). The first verse of this fresh section opens with the expression "after these things," and again at the close of the verse we read of the things which must take place after these things." Clearly, then, these words refer to the third division and bring us to the strictly prophetic part of the Book. The things about to take place clearly refer to future events occurring on the earth that form the crisis of the present age, and introduce the blessings of the age to come — the Millennial earth. Chapters 4 and 5 are introductory giving us a vision of things in heaven in order that we may learn the attitude of God towards events on earth, and telling us also the place of the saints of this age, and former ages, during these events. The great theme of chapter 4 is the Throne of God, while chapter 5 is occupied with the Book in which all these events are chronicled. We are thus to learn that behind all that takes place on earth there is the over-ruling throne of God, and that every event is according to the settled counsels of God. When the corrupt professing Church has shut

the door to Christ on earth it will be found that there is an open door in heaven through which the true Church, like John. can pass to be with Christ in heaven. The One Who calls John from earth to heaven is identified with the One Who first spoke to him of the Seven Churches. This we know is the Lord, Himself. So will it be the Lord's own voice that will call us to meet Him in the air. The standpoint from which we view things will make a great difference as to the way in which we view them. We are invited, even as John, to pass in spirit into heavenly scenes and view all that is yet to take place on earth, from heaven's point of view. We are partakers of the heavenly calling, and as heavenly men we are to view these coming events. If the heavenly calling of the Church is not known, and the heavenly position not accepted, we shall fail in a right interpretation of these coming events by being occupied with, not distracted by, current events in the world around.

(Revelation 4:2-3). The immediate result of the call was that John "was in the spirit." Like Paul, when caught up to the third heaven, he was not conscious of the body, He was wholly absorbed by the great sights and themes of heaven. He was there as a witness to bear testimony to the Church of all that was disclosed to him. Paul, when caught up into Paradise, "heard unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter." John, on the contrary, is told to write the things which he saw, and "seal not the sayings of the prophecy" (Revelation 1:19 : Revelation 22:10). The difference would seem to be that Paul sees the things that belong to the inner circle of the Father's house, whereas John, while he truly conducts us into heavenly scenes, and tells us of heavenly things, yet it is of events in relation to earth. It is our happy privilege to profit by what John has written of the things he saw and heard. Thus in spirit we can pass into this heavenly scene, breathe its pure air, and feast our souls upon the things that speak of Christ. In all this great scene there is nothing to minister to the flesh or divert from Christ. The first thing we see is a throne: moreover the throne is "set in heaven." The throne is the emblem of rule and authority: the guarantee for order, blessing, and security throughout the universe. The fall was in reality a challenge to the throne; sin is rebellion against the throne: infidelity is a denial of the existence of the throne, pride aspires to the throne, and the devil defies the throne. How blessed, then, that after thousands of years of rebellion against the throne, to pass into heaven and find the throne "set in heaven," unshaken, unmoved, and immoveable. Twelve times the throne is mentioned in the course of the chapter, so that we may truly say that in this passage the great theme is the glory of the throne of God.

Even now the heavens do rule, though in a hidden way. Our great High Priest "has sat down on the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens," and from that throne He ever lives to make intercession for the saints as they pass through this world (Hebrews 7:25; Hebrews 8:1). For the believer the throne is a throne of grace. From the throne that John sees judgment is about to proceed. Today evil abounds, lawlessness prevails, and increasingly the world is marked by violence and corruption, and God suffers long with the evil to give men space for repentance, and to make known His grace. Nevertheless, faith knows that, behind all, the throne of God remains unmoved in heaven. The consciousness that God is behind all, and that His throne remains with all its grace available for the saints, with all its mighty power untouched by the evil of men, will keep the soul in the calm of heaven while walking amidst the unrest of earth.

Moreover, "One sat on the throne." This glorious Person is not described, but precious stones are used as symbols to set forth His glory. We must remember that God is seen in connection with the throne. It is not the heart of the Father revealed by the Son who dwelt in His bosom, that is before

us, but the glory of God set forth in Christ on a throne in connection with the government of the universe. The precious stones are symbols setting forth the radiance of divine glory in government. It is seen in heaven though not yet manifest on earth. On earth we see the misgovernment of man and the longsuffering of God. Had the radiancy of the throne manifested itself upon a sinful world it would have involved judgment for all. The vision carries us beyond the day of Grace to a time when the Church will have been caught up to heaven, to be followed by the radiancy of the throne shining forth in judgment upon the earth.

Further, John sees "a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald." From Genesis 9:1-29 we know that the rainbow speaks of the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature upon the earth. It speaks of blessing for earth secured by divine promise, but of blessing after judgment. The rainbow comes after the storm even as God’s promise of blessing follows when the judgment of the flood is passed. The rainbow encircling the throne is the sure sign that beyond the judgment of the nations will he blessing for the earth.

(Revelation 4:4). Round about the throne John sees four and twenty thrones; and upon the thrones "four and twenty elders." That the elders do not represent angelic beings is clear from the eleventh verse of the following chapter, where we find the angels described as a distinct company standing round the elders. The number twenty-four would seem to be an allusion to the twenty-four courses of the priesthood instituted by David for the "princes" or "governors of the sanctuary." In David’s day they were invested with a royal and priestly character and represented the whole priesthood (1 Chronicles 24:5). The saints of this day have the character of "a royal priesthood" to show forth the praises of God (1 Peter 2:9). Thus the elders would appear to symbolise the Old Testament saints as well as the Assembly, in their completeness, associated with Christ in glory. Christ is seen upon His throne about to reign, and the saints are seen with Him in His reign — for He is throned and they too are throned. They are spoken of as "elders," signifying spiritual maturity. No longer do they "know in part;" they are intelligent in the mind of heaven. They are not seen as departed spirits, but with bodies of glory clothed in white raiment, speaking of their priestly character (Exodus 28:40-43). On their heads are "crowns of gold" speaking of their royal character. They have finished their earthly pilgrimage in which they suffered for Christ: now they are crowned to reign with Christ.

We have only to trace the allusions to the elders through the course of the Revelation to see how truly representative they are of the saints in glory:

First, the elders are found in heaven associated with the throne before the judgments commence. They are not on earth; they do not pass through the judgments, nor are they, like the white robed throng of saints described in Revelation 7:1-17, taken out of the great tribulation, but they are found in heaven before the judgments commence.

Secondly, they are a redeemed company as we learn from the following chapter, verses 8 to 10.

Thirdly, they are a worshipping company as we learn from Revelation 4:10 : Revelation 5:14; Revelation 11:16; and Revelation 19:4.

Fourthly they are an intelligent company of saints, knowing the mind of heaven Revelation 5:5 and Revelation 7:13-17.

(Revelation 4:5). The character of the throne is clearly indicated by the solemn statement that "out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices." Lightnings and thunderings are the accompaniments of judgment, not the symbols of mercy and grace. Today mercy flows from a throne of grace; in the Millennial day a river of water carrying blessing to the earth will flow from the throne of God and the Lamb. In the solemn interval between the termination of the day of grace and the commencement of the Kingdom glory, the throne will be executing judgment upon the nations fitly symbolised by lightnings and thunderings.

Further, the Apostle sees "seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God." Here, surely, we have a symbolic presentation of the Spirit of God in His fulness: but presented in connection with the fire of judgment, reminding us that, as with Israel so with the world, God is going to purge away all filth "By the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning" (Isaiah 4:4). Those who today refuse the One Who speaks in grace from heaven, will find in the day to come that "Our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29).

(Revelation 4:6). Before the throne is "a sea of glass like onto crystal." Before the sanctuary, in Solomon’s day, there was a sea of water for the use of the priests (1 Kings 7:23-26). Here the sea has become glass like unto crystal, a symbol of the fixed and absolute purity of the throne. In heaven nothing that defiles can enter.

(Revelation 4:6-8). Lastly, the Apostle sees in the midst of the throne and round about the throne "four living creatures." They would appear to be symbols of the executors of the government of God. They are four in number, probably indicating the completeness of God’s government flowing out to every quarter of the globe. "Full of eyes" would symbolise the fulness of discernment in God’s government from which nothing is hid. The lion, the calf, the face as a man, and the flying eagle, may signify that the government of God will be characterised by strength, firmness, intelligence, and rapidity of administration. Unceasingly they say, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was and is, and is to come." They testify that the government of God is holy, resistless in power, and unchangeable in character. The executors of the government of God will become the occasion of glory and thanksgiving to Him that sits upon the throne for ever and ever.

(Revelation 4:9-10). Moreover the government of God will call forth the worship of the saints, who use the crowns that Christ has given them to own their perfect submission to Him. They cast their crowns before the throne and own the Lord is worthy to receive glory and honour and power, for He is the Creator of all, and for His pleasure all things are and were created. Sin has marred the fair creation, so that now the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain; but the saints in heaven, having the mind of the Lord can discern that all the evil will be dealt with in judgment, so that once again God can take pleasure in His creation, even as of old, when the creation work was finished. "God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good" (Genesis 1:31).

Thus, as the prelude to the coming judgments we are carried into heaven to see the throne of judgment in heaven unshaken by the wickedness of men: to see the glory of the One Who sits upon the throne; to learn in the rainbow that all the promises of God for the blessing of the earth will follow the judgments of the throne; to learn that the saints of the previous ages, and the present period, will be safe in heaven before the judgments fall; to learn that the judgments of the throne will be carried out in the fulness of the Spirit according to the perfection of God’s government, and that as a result the Lord will be worshipped and praised as the Creator, and the

whole creation, cleared of all evil, will once again be for His pleasure. Let us remember that these things are written that even now we may enter into them in faith and thus be kept in perfect calm while yet in a world of turmoil.

H. Smith.

S. The Well of Bethlehem.

The Well of Bethlehem.

2 Samuel 23:13-17.

Hamilton Smith.

Edification Vol. 6, 1932, page 169. The beautiful story of the three men who drew water from the well of Bethlehem, is preceded by the account of the great exploits of the three mightiest amongst David's mighty men. Whether they are the same three who broke through the host of the Philistines and drew the water from the well, is not very clear, and probably immaterial. It is, however, important to mark the difference between their great deeds, and the service rendered to David in obtaining the water from the well.

Adio was the chief among the captains. His name means "ornament." Doubtless he filled his exalted position with credit to himself, and advantage to the King, for he had successfully attacked eight hundred of David's enemies, at one time (verse 8).

Eleazar defied the Philistines in the day when the men of Israel turned back. Single handed he arose and smote the enemy, and when victory was assured, the people of, Israel, who had left Eleazar to face the enemy alone "returned after him," but "only to spoil." The Lord wrought a great victory through Eleazar, and the Israelites reaped the fruits of victory (verses 9, 10).

Shammah is famous as having "stood in the midst of the ground and defended it," in the day when others fled (verses 11, 12). In the conflicts of the Lord's people we see these different forms of service. There are times when the Lord calls for an attack upon the forces of evil, as in the case of Adino. There are occasions when there is spoil to be gained through conflict, as in the day of Eleazar's victory. So too there are times when we are called to stand our ground, and act on the defensive, as it was in the day of Shammah's mighty deed.

How important, in their times and seasons are such mighty deeds. However, whether in David's day, or in our own day, one thing marks such deeds, they are for the benefit of people, as well as for the glory of the King. When, however, we come to the three mighty men who drew the water from the well, we have a very different form of service. If the victories, we have considered, had the blessing of the people in view, this touching act of service was wholly for the benefit of the King.

These three mighty men "came to David in the harvest time unto the cave of Adullam" (13). It seems as if they left the world in the day of its plenty, to identify themselves with David in the day of his poverty and reproach.

David was in the hold, while a garrison of the Philistines occupied the place of David's early home. David, thinking of the well by the gate of Bethlehem, from which doubtless he had often drawn water in his youth, expresses his longing for a refreshing draught from the well. "Oh," says he,

"that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate!" It is no command that requires obedience; it is no call for service; it is only the expression of his longing desire. And yet this expressed desire calls forth this devoted act of love in a way that no command would have done.

Many would have been ready to risk their lives in carrying out some service for the benefit of the kingdom; but these mighty men were ready to face death in order to do something that was wholly for the gratification of the desire of David. They broke through the host of the Philistines, drew water from the well, and brought it to David. This act of devotion delighted the heart of David, and he sees in it a sacrifice of which the Lord alone is worthy. Hence, refusing to drink the water, he pours it out before the Lord.

We, in our day, and according to the spiritual principles of the day, may know at times what it is to attack the powers of evil, to gain spoil from the enemies' ranks, and to stand on the defensive in the conflict for the truth. We, too, may fight the Lord's battles, but how much do we know of this higher service that does something for the heart of Christ alone? "Oh, that one would give me," says David. Are there not occasions when we can give something to the One who gave everything for us? When as at Bethany, in the day of the Lord, they did something for the One who had done so much for them — when "they made Him a supper" who had made a feast for all the world. Do we count it a rare privilege to be able to give to Christ that which will minister joy to His heart? Was not Mary's service of this elevated character, when, six days before the Passover, she anointed the feet of the Lord with her costly ointment and wiped His feet with the hairs of her head? Was she not, in the face of the hatred of enemies and the murmurings of friends, refreshing the heart of the despised and rejected Son of David, against whom, at that very moment, the world was plotting with murderous hate? And even as the water secured by these devoted men, was poured out before the Lord, so the odour of Mary's ointment goes up before the Lord as a sweet savour. It filled all the house where they were sitting. Is not David's "Oh, that one would give me" a faint anticipation of the Lord's dying request, "Do this in remembrance of Me"? When we answer to this request, we are not fighting the Lord's battles, we are not getting spoil, we are not defending the truth but we are doing something wholly for Christ; we are ministering to His heart by responding to His love. May we know better what it is to draw water from the well and pour it out before the Lord for the joy of His heart.

S. The flock of God.

"The Flock of God."

Hamilton Smith.

Extracted from Scripture Truth magazine, Volume 10, 1918, page 9. In the eightieth Psalm Asaph addresses God as the Shepherd of Israel, and likens His people to a flock. In the one hundredth Psalm Israel takes the ground of being Jehovah's people and "the sheep of His pasture." Jeremiah, too, in the same strain, speaks of God's ancient people as a "beautiful flock" (Jeremiah 13:20). But while God ever remained the Great Shepherd of Israel, He also delegated authority to under-shepherds who were responsible to care for the flock. In the exercise of this responsibility the shepherds lamentably failed, and as a result the flock was ruined and scattered. In Ezekiel 34:1-31 we have a solemn denunciation of these under-shepherds for the violation of their trust. In the first four verses three distinct charges are brought against them.

First. They are charged with using their position to exalt themselves at the expense of the flock. "Thus saith the Lord God unto the shepherds: Woe to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: but ye feed not the flock." They fed themselves; they indulged themselves; they clothed themselves, but they allowed the flock to perish for lack of food (vers. 2, 3).

Second. The shepherds are charged with having utterly neglected the flock. There were weak sheep, but they had not strengthened them; there were sick sheep, but they had not healed them; there were wounded sheep, but they had not bound up their wounds; there were sheep driven away from the flock, but they made no effort to recover them; and there were wandering sheep, but they had not gone after the lost (ver. 4). Occupied with themselves they had entirely neglected the good of the sheep.

Third. These shepherds are charged with having ruled God's flock "with force and with cruelty." Not only had the sheep been neglected, but they had been crushed and oppressed for the selfish ends of the rulers. But the failure of the shepherds of Israel has been repeated, alas, by the shepherds of God's people today. For in this day also God has His flock. Passing through this world, the Lord Jesus gathered a company of Jewish believers around Himself, leading them outside the Jewish fold. To these the Gentile believers were afterwards added, and, according to the Lord's own word, there was "one flock and one Shepherd" (John 10:16). The Lord Himself is the Good Shepherd who gave his life for the sheep, and the Great Shepherd, as risen again from among the dead — the One who has triumphed over the power of death, and He can say, "My sheep shall never perish, neither shall any one pluck them out of My hand" (John 10:28). But furthermore, the Lord is the Chief Shepherd, and as such He has again delegated the oversight of His flock to under-shepherds. Paul, in his farewell address to the elders of the church at Ephesus, gives the under-shepherds a solemn charge in Acts 20:28-35. He warns them to take heed to

themselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Spirit had made them overseers. He gives them a threefold exhortation in reference to the flock, which answers to the threefold denunciation of the shepherds of Israel.

First. Instead of exalting themselves they are exhorted to "feed the church of God" (ver. 28).

Second. Instead of neglecting the sheep they are to "watch" and "support the weak" (vers. 31, 35).

Third. Instead of ruling with "force and cruelty" they are to remember "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (ver. 35).

Furthermore, the Apostle Peter, before his departure, gives a threefold charge to the under-shepherds (1 Peter 5:1-4).

First. They are exhorted to "feed the flock of God."

Second. To care for the flock, "taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind."

Third. They are warned not to lord it over God’s heritage. Not to drive the flock but to lead as "ensamples to the flock."

But, as we have seen, these are the very things in which the shepherds of old so signally failed. Instead of feeding the flock they fed themselves; instead of taking the oversight they neglected the flock; instead of being ensamples they ruled the flock with harshness and cruelty. And, alas, as the shepherds of Israel failed, so, in like manner, the shepherds of the Christian flock have failed, and with a like result. Turning again to Ezekiel 34:1-31, we find the prophet, in verses 5 and 6, depicting the pitiful condition of God’s flock as a result of the failure of the shepherds. The sheep are scattered for the lack of a shepherd to lead. Being scattered they become a prey to the beasts of the field. Harassed by the beasts of prey they wander through all the barren mountains and on every high hill. Instead of one flock — one beautiful flock — we have scattered, harassed, and wandering sheep with none to search or seek after them. And what a solemn and striking picture of the condition of God’s people today. As a result of the failure of the leaders, God’s people have been scattered, and being scattered they have fallen a prey to the enemy. United they could have resisted the inroads of the enemy, but scattered they fall an easy prey to every evil; and under the power of evil they are starving and wandering in a solitary way in this barren world.

Having portrayed the sorrowful condition of the sheep, the Lord proceeds to pass sentence upon the responsible shepherds: "Thus saith the Lord God, Behold I am against the shepherds, and I will require my flock at their hand" (vers. 7-10). But if God is against the shepherds He is for the sheep, as He says, "I will deliver my flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them." And in the verses that follow we have a magnificent description of how God shepherds His flock. And as the Chief Shepherd acts so should the under-shepherds. Thus in these verses (11-16) we have the perfect example for the true-hearted shepherd, whether in Israel or amongst God’s people to-day. We do well to take to heart the sevenfold actings of the Chief Shepherd as set forth in these touching verses.

First. God says, "Behold I, even I, will . . . SEARCH for my sheep." They have been scattered, and they have wandered, but they are "mine," says God, and "I will SEARCH for them." May we never

forget, whatever the condition of the sheep, they belong to Christ. He thought of them from all eternity, but, alas, we can only give them the odd moments of our lives. He left His home of glory to seek His sheep, and can we not leave our poor homes to seek them? He went to the uttermost distance of the cross to find His sheep, but we can hardly go into the next street to seek them.

Second. Having sought them He "tends" them, for thus the passage should read, "I will both search for My sheep and TEND them as a shepherd TENDETH his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered." His sheep are the objects of his tender care. After the Good Samaritan found that poor wounded man and bound up his wounds, he brought him to an inn and "took care of him," and ere he left he put the man in charge of the host, saying, "Take care of him." He seems to say to the host, "Do what I have been doing." And immediately afterwards we hear Martha coming to the Lord and saying, "Dost Thou not care." Oh yes, Martha, He cares, as you will soon learn when the death of your brother plunges you into the deep waters of sorrow, and He comes and walks with you and weeps with you. Yes, blessed be His name, He cares, but how little we care. We have failed to act the part of the host. We have failed in tending the sheep. But not only does the Lord tend His sheep, but He does it in a very blessed way. It is not as one far removed in some high position giving directions for the care of the sheep, but it is as a shepherd "among his sheep that are scattered." We speak of the Lord in the midst of two or three gathered together in His name, and blessedly true, but we do well to remember there is such a thing as the Lord "among His sheep that are scattered." If we have driven them away, will He desert them? Never. If we have scattered them, will He forsake them? Never. Will He leave them because they follow not with us? Surely not. He will never give them up. Are they scattered? He is "among His sheep that are scattered." We speak at times as if "two or three gathered to His name" would imply a company of saints apart from the ruin of Christendom, but let us never forget that, however glorious the future destiny of the church, that, at this moment, the one church of God, the church to which we belong, is a ruined and scattered church so far as any outward display is concerned.

Third. Further, the Lord says: "I will DELIVER them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day." While leaders are busy darkening the sky with their controversies, the enemy is busy scattering the sheep. While the shepherds wrangle, the sheep wander. We can scatter, but what little power we have to deliver. But the Lord will deliver. Not one of His sheep will be left behind when He acts in delivering power.

Fourth. But the Lord does not deliver His people from the powers of the enemy and then leave them; He also "gathers" them, and so we read, "I will bring them out from the peoples and GATHER them from the countries." "Separation" and "gathering" must go together. Separation without gathering only puffs up and leads to the spirit of the Pharisee, and to further scattering. When the Lord separates His people from evil He gathers them around Himself. Christ is God’s great gathering centre. We may get Christians together, but if it is not gathering to Christ and with Christ it will only add to the scattering. We may gather people around some great truth, or to deepen spirituality, or to increase holiness and thus make a holiness party; or we may get Christians together to express the truth of the One Body, and to maintain a scriptural discipline, and thus make an ecclesiastical party. We may gather believers together to preach the gospel, and thus make an evangelical party. But, however good our intentions, if we fall short of gathering to Christ as the living centre we shall only add to the scattering. It has been well said by another, "It is not Christians but Christ who is become God’s centre. We may gather Christians together,

but if it is not Christ in one's own spirit, it is scattering. God knows no centre of union but the Lord Jesus Christ. It is Himself the object, and nothing but Christ can be the centre. Whatever is not gathering round that centre, for Him and from Him, is scattering. There may be gathering, but, if not 'with Me,' it is scattering. We are by nature so essentially sectarian that we have need to watch against this. I cannot make Christ the centre of my efforts if He is not the centre of my thoughts" (J.N.D.). The Lord Himself has said, "He that is not with Me is against Me, and He that gathereth not with Me scattereth" (Luke 11:23).

Fifth. But what does God do with His delivered and gathered saints? "HE WILL BRING THEM TO THEIR OWN LAND" (ver. 13). There is a company we can call our own (Acts 4:23), and there is a country we can call "our own." It is a heavenly country, but, alas, as the result of the scattering of the sheep the heavenly calling of God's people is almost unknown, and the people of God have lost their pilgrim character, have settled down in this world, and sought to make the world that nailed Christ to the cross a respectable and comfortable place. Israel has been scattered and lost their land, Christians have been scattered and have lost the truth of their heavenly calling. But when God takes His people in hand, whether earthly or heavenly, it will be to "bring them to their own land." And what more important in this day than to seek to arouse the people of God to their heavenly calling. If gathered by the Lord it is that we may be led by the Lord into our own country.

Sixth. Having led His flock into their own land the Lord "FEEDS THEM IN A GOOD PASTURE." The true food for the Christian is in the heavenly country. When Israel were brought to their own land they fed upon the old corn of the land (Joshua 5:11-12). Passing through the wilderness we need Christ as the manna, but as a heavenly people we feed upon Christ as "the old corn of the land." We need to feed upon all the glories and perfections of Christ in the place where He is. And what we feed upon forms us. To feed upon Christ in His earthly path of humiliation will win our affections, but to feed upon Christ in His glories will change our characters. Beholding with unveiled face the glory of the Lord we are changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Seventh. And lastly, in that heavenly land He gives His people "Rest": "I WILL CAUSE THEM TO LIE DOWN" (ver. 15). In this world there is no lasting rest for the people of God. The Christian is like the dove that went out from the Ark and "found no rest for the sole of her foot." The raven found corruption to feed on, but the dove found nothing but death. "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God." And when God brings His people to rest it is "in a fat pasture" (ver. 14). Hungry sheep will not lie down in a fat pasture, they will feed. If they lie down it is a sure proof they are satisfied. The great Shepherd of the sheep leads them into a region of satisfied desire. When we awake in His likeness we shall be satisfied. Yes, but "He shall see of the fruit of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied." He will make us to lie down in perfect rest, and "He will rest in His love."

How perfect are the ways of the Chief Shepherd of the sheep. In the light of this perfect example of shepherd care may we have grace to judge our past failures and seek, for the little time that may yet remain, to shape our service according to this divine standard. How better can we serve the flock, or seek the approbation of the Chief Shepherd, than by, 1. Searching for the Lord's sheep, 2. Tending the sheep, 3. Delivering the sheep from evil, 4. Gathering the sheep to the Lord, 5. Leading the sheep to their own land, 6. Feeding the sheep, and 7. Bringing the sheep into rest.

May we remember the words of the Lord, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them" (John 13:16). And if we "do" them, when the Chief Shepherd shall appear we "shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (1 Peter 5:4).

Chapter 89

S. The love that will not let me go.

The love that will not let me go.

Hamilton Smith.

Extracted from Scripture Truth magazine, Volume 20, 1928, page 28.

How blessed to have found in Christ a Friend who loves with a love that will not let us go, according to that Word which tells us, "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end."

Such love — the everlasting love of Christ, that never gives us up — cannot be satisfied until it has drawn out our love in response to His love. The answer to His love will only be realized in its fulness when at last we have reached love's eternal home. Nevertheless, on the way to the home, the love that appreciates Christ, in the place of His rejection and the day of His rejection, is very sweet to His heart. This we may surely learn from the value that is set by the Lord on the love of Mary, that led her to anoint His feet with the very precious ointment.

Very encouraging it is, and good for our souls, to learn the gracious ways of the Lord with his people in order to awaken love, maintain love, and deepen love, in our hearts. It is these gracious ways of the Lord that we would briefly trace in the New Testament stories of two devoted women.

1. THE AWAKENING OF LOVE. — Luke 7:36-39, Luke 7:47 In the great scene that takes place in the house of Simon the Pharisee, we see the awakening of love for the Saviour in the heart of a sinner. The Lord, in the perfection of His way, had stooped to grace with His presence the feast which the Pharisee had spread. While sitting at the table an unbidden guest enters, of whom the Lord can say, "she loved much." How, we may ask, was this love awakened in her soul?

There is no question as to the character of the woman. The Spirit of God has described her as "a woman in the city which was a sinner." Moreover her bad reputation was well known, for Simon is also aware that "she is a sinner." She was a sinner and knew it, and Simon knew it and everyone knew it. Further, she was a burdened sinner, and possibly had heard those wonderful words of the Lord, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Be this as it may, it is beyond question, that she saw in Christ the grace that could bless the undeserving. Thus driven by her need, and drawn by His grace, with the boldness of faith, she enters the Pharisee's house and takes her stand at the feet of Jesus. The Spirit of God calls attention to the fine scene that follows with a "Behold." He would arrest our attention and have us to turn aside and see this great sight — the meeting between the devil's hell-bound sinner and God's heaven-sent Saviour. Doubtless, the onlookers were struck dumb with amazement, as they watched the scene unfolding itself before their eyes. They might well question what would happen. Would the Lord expose her character, condemn her sins, and dismiss her from His holy presence? Ah, no! The proud Pharisee may condemn the sinner, to find himself exposed by the Saviour; but the Lord will not condemn a confessed sinner. The wisdom of His way is as perfect as the grace of His heart. At

first no word is spoken. The guests are silent in wonder, the Lord is silent in grace, the woman is silent in sorrow. No sound breaks the silence but the sobs of a weeping sinner. If, however, nothing is said, much takes place, for the sinner’s heart was broken and the sinner’s heart was won. She "stood at His feet behind Him weeping" and she "kissed" His feet. The tears tell of a heart that is broken, and the kisses of heart that is won.

What was it that broke her heart, and won her heart? Was it not that she saw something of the grace and holiness of the Saviour, and in the light of His glory she realized, as never before, the sinfulness of her life and her heart, and this broke her heart? But more, she realized that though she was a sinner full of sin, yet He was a Saviour full of grace for one who was full of sin. She found herself in the presence of One who knew her vile life through and through, and yet loved her, and this won her heart.

Good for each one, if we, too, have been in His presence, burdened and wretched by reason of our sins, there to discover that in Him we have found One who knows the worst about us and yet loves us. Thus to have love for Christ awakened in our souls, as we sing, I’ve found a Friend, oh, such a Friend Who loved me ere I knew Him; Who drew me with the cords of love, And thus has bound me to Him.

2. THE MAINTENANCE OF LOVE. — Luke 10:38-42.

We have seen how love for Christ is awakened, and blessed indeed when at the outset of the Christian life the heart is won for Christ. We have now to learn how the heart, in which love has been awakened, can be maintained in the freshness of first love. Do we not all know that, with the passing of time, many things may creep in between the soul and Christ? Not always gross things, which indeed might arrest the soul by the very wretchedness they bring, but things that are small and apparently harmless, — "the little foxes that spoil the vines," and render the life unfruitful. The allowance of these little things will cast a chill over the affections, and gradually form an icy crust over the heart, and the Lord has to say to us, "Thou hast left thy first love." Thus from one cause and another we often see, while love to Christ has been truly awakened in souls, some make little progress in spiritual intelligence whereas others grow in deeper acquaintance with the Lord and His mind. How, then, is the love, that has been awakened, to be maintained? Will not the home at Bethany supply the answer? In the two sisters we have two saints in whom love to Christ has been truly awakened; yet in one sister we see a believer growing in grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus, while in the other sister we see a saint who is hindered by self and hampered by her service.

Martha’s love was shown by seeking to meet the physical necessities of the Lord as a Man. Mary’s love was seen in seeking to gratify the deep longings of His heart by hearing His word.

Martha was occupied with the "many things" which all have their end in death. Mary was occupied with the "one thing" that death could not take from her. One has said, "No attention, even to Himself in the flesh, though it were from one that loved Him and whom He loved, could replace this. The ’many things’ end only in disappointment and death, instead of leading into life eternal, as did the words of Jesus, issuing from a heart broken that it might let forth the stream of life."

If, then, we would know how love is awakened, we must in spirit visit the home of Simon; but would we know how love is maintained, let us visit the house at Bethany. Standing at the feet of the

Saviour, in the house of Simon, love was awakened in the heart of a sinner; sitting at the feet of the Master, in the home of Martha, love was maintained. At His feet we are in His company; in His company we hear His words, and His words declare His heart. There we are learners in the school of love. How much do we know of the good part chosen by Mary — the turning aside from the busy round of life, and the activities of service to be alone with Jesus, and more, to draw nigh to Jesus for the love of being near Him? The Lord loves our company; He delights to have us in His presence. He may dispense with our busy service, but He cannot do without ourselves. Thus only will first love be maintained, and if lost regained. We cannot live on the past. Past experiences may have awakened love, but only present communion can maintain love.

3. THE DEEPENING OF LOVE. — John 11:1-57.

Passing now to another incident in the story of Mary of Bethany, we shall learn another lesson in the story of love. If in Luke 10:1-42 we have seen how love is maintained in the common round of life, in John 11:1-57 we shall learn how love is deepened in the sorrows of life. There life was flowing in its usual channel, here the everyday life is arrested by a great sorrow. Sickness has invaded the Bethany circle, and the shadow of death is creeping over the home. In the trial that has overtaken them how will the sisters act? Moved by grace they take the best possible course. They draw upon the love of Christ. In Luke 10:1-42 Mary is learning the love of Christ in the calm of a quiet life; in John 11:1-57 she is drawing upon that love amidst the storms of life. There she enjoyed His love in His company; here she uses His love in her sorrow. All this is writ plainly in the appeal that these devoted women make to the Lord. They send to Him saying, "He whom Thou lovest is sick" (verse 2). How brightly the faith and confidence in the Lord of these two sisters shines out in this brief message. They turn to the right Person, for "they sent unto Him." They use the right plea, for they say "Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick." They plead, not the feeble love of Lazarus for the Lord, but the perfect and unfailing love of the Lord for Lazarus. So, too, they appeal to the Lord in the right way, for they do not suggest what the Lord shall do; they neither ask the Lord to heal, nor to come, nor even to speak a word on their behalf. They simply spread out their sorrow before the Lord and cast themselves upon the boundless resources of unbounded love. Will love disappoint them? Ah, no! For love delights to respond to the appeal of hearts moved by love.

However, love divine will take its perfect way. A way indeed that to mere nature may seem passing strange. The sisters have delighted His heart by drawing upon His love; now He will delight their hearts by deepening in their souls the sense of His love, and thus deepening their love for Him. For it is ever thus, the deeper the sense of His love, the deeper will be the response of our love. We love Him because He first loved us. To accomplish His gracious work He will use the sorrows of life, and, that His love may be deepened in their souls, He will first deepen the sorrow. The saints are called to the glory of God after they have "suffered awhile" (2 Peter 5: 10); so, on our way to glory, we often catch some brighter rays of His glory after a time of suffering. It was thus with the sisters. They had to suffer awhile, for the Lord tarries, and no word comes from the Lord. The days are passing, Lazarus is sinking, the shadow of death is creeping over the home. At last death has come; Lazarus is dead. They have suffered awhile; they shall now see His glory — for "this sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby." To sight it was for death, in reality death was being used to bring into display the glory of Christ and swell the triumph of His victory over death. To accomplish these great ends, how

perfect the way He takes.

Human love, thinking only of the relief of the sick one, would have started at once for Bethany. Human prudence, thinking only of self, would never have gone, even as the disciples say, "Master, the Jews of late sought to stone Thee; and goest Thou thither again." The Lord, rising above human love, and human prudence, acts according to divine love moved by divine wisdom. "As for God, His way is perfect."

After patience has had her perfect work; in love's due time, the Lord comes to the bereaved sisters at Bethany, and reveals the deep love of His heart, as He talks with them, and walks with them, and weeps with them. He is going to deepen their love by His words of love, and ways of love, and tears of love. What depths of love lie behind those sublime words, "Jesus wept." It was a wonderful sight to see a sinner weeping in the presence of His love, but more wonderful to see the Saviour weeping in the presence of our sorrow. That we should weep because of our sins is a small wonder; that He should weep because of our sorrows is a great wonder — a wonder that discloses how near He came, and how near He is to a sorrowing saint.

Why, we may ask, these tears? The Jews, standing round the grave, misinterpret the tears, for they say, "Behold how He loved him!" Truly, the Lord loved Lazarus, but the tears were not the expression of His love for Lazarus. The sisters may weep for the loss of their brother; there was, however, no need for the Lord to weep for one He was about to raise. It was not for the dead He wept, but for the living — not for the loss of Lazarus, but for the sorrow of Mary and Martha. In a little, love will raise Lazarus, but first love will weep with Martha and Mary. He broke His heart to bind up our hearts, and shed His tears to dry our tears. In so doing He declared His love and deepens our love. Thus He uses the trials, the sorrows, and the rough ways of life to unfold the treasures of His love, and draw out our love to Him.

After this great trial the sisters would surely have said, "We knew that He loved us, but, until the trial came, we never knew that He loved us so much as to walk with us and weep with us in the trial." At His feet, in Luke 10:1-42, Mary was learning His love; in John 11:1-57 she draws upon the love of which she had learned, and is deepened in the love that she draws upon.

What holy happy lessons can we learn from these different scenes. We learn that at the feet of Jesus, as sinners, love is awakened; at the feet of Jesus, as learners, love is maintained; and at the feet of Jesus, in our sorrows, love is deepened.

S. The man that well-nigh slipped.

The man that well-nigh slipped.

Psalms 73:1-28.

Hamilton Smith.

Extracted from Scripture Truth magazine, Volume 15, 1923, pages 58. The writer opens this beautiful Psalm with a simple but blessed statement concerning God, and closes with a happy conclusion concerning himself. "Truly God is good" is the statement of the first verse; "it is good for me to draw near to God" is the conclusion of the last verse. Accept the statement and we must agree with the conclusion. The statement, however, is not a general declaration of the goodness of God toward His creatures — true as that would be — but it is the assertion that "God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart." The great object of the Psalm is to prove the absolute goodness of God to His people in spite of the trying circumstances they may have to pass through, the sorrows with which they may be faced, and the sufferings they may be called to endure. This truth, however, must be learnt experimentally. Hence the Psalmist recounts the experiences by which he learned these two great truths. First, that in spite of prevailing evil God is good to His people, and hence, the second truth, that, in the midst of prevailing evil, God is the resource of His people. The Psalmist opens the story of his experiences by telling us that as he passed along his way, through an evil world, there came a day when his feet were almost gone, and his steps had well nigh slipped (verse 2). It is written, "Narrow is the way that leadeth unto life" and this was as true for the godly Psalmist in his day, as for the Christian pilgrim in the present day. A narrow path needs but a single false step on either side to miss the way. It is not necessary to commit some grave fault, of which others can take account, in order to slip from the narrow path. The path of the Psalmist was not marred by any gross failure that would have disgraced him in the eyes of the world; no angry and impatient words had passed his lips that would have betrayed the state of his heart, and yet he had well nigh slipped. Had we not his own confession none would have known this from his conduct and speech.

However in spite of all appearances to the contrary, he confesses that he had well nigh lost confidence in God. His feet had almost slipped from the rock (verse 26, margin). Moreover he lets us know how it came to pass that his confidence in God was so severely shaken. The secret comes out. He was occupied with evil when out of touch with God. Hence he had a limited and perverted view of the evil. He saw the prosperity of the wicked and he saw the adversity of the godly, and in result he envied the portion of the wicked, he deprecated the portion of the godly, and he well nigh lost confidence in God. In verses 4 to 12 he draws a solemn picture of the wicked. We must, however, remember this is a description of the wicked as seen by a saint when, for the moment, out of communion with God; so that, while all that he says is true, it is not the full truth. Still it is true that the wicked are characterized by "pride" and "violence," "corruption" and "oppression." Not only do they persecute the godly, but they are blasphemers who "set their mouth against the heavens." They say God takes no notice of the affairs of men, there is no knowledge in

the most High, and yet withal they prosper and increase in riches. This then is the picture presented by a soul out of communion. The wicked prospering, the godly suffering, and God indifferent. The government of God apparently clean gone from the earth. In the following verses (13 and 14) he describes the solemn effect upon a godly soul of occupation with evil when out of communion with God. He is tempted to think it is all in vain to have a clean heart and innocent hands. What profit is there in restraining my thoughts, and refraining from wickedness, when after all the wicked prosper and I am plagued and chastened every morning?

There are two snares to which the saint is ever exposed and by which our feet can slip from the rock of heart confidence in God. One, by occupation with evil when out of touch with God, the other by indifference to evil under the plea of love. If like the Psalmist we are occupied with evil apart from God, we shall lose confidence in God. If we are indifferent to evil we shall become nauseous to God. Indifference to evil in the church is indifference to the glory of Christ. Indifference to evil in the world is indifference to the rights of God.

It was the first of these two snares in which the Psalmist was caught: the result being he was thoroughly cast down and depressed. He is tempted to think (for mark it is not what he says but his inmost thoughts that he is laying bare) that his godliness is all in vain, for apparently it only involves him in fresh sorrows morning by morning.

However, in this the darkest moment of his experiences, Divine affections assert themselves (verse 15), proving indeed that, though his steps had well nigh slipped, yet, Divine life was working in his soul. Hot and angry thoughts were rushing through his mind, but love to the people of God, the proof of faith in God, held his lips. He says, "If I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children." But though he puts a seal upon his lips, yet a turmoil of painful thoughts disturbs his inward peace. He knows not how to reconcile the goodness of God to His people with the suffering state in which they are found, while at the same time the wicked prosper (verse 16). But there is a limit to the conflict of his soul. It goes on "until" he returns to that secret place from which in spirit he had wandered — "Until," as he says, "I went into the sanctuary of God" (verse 17). The sanctuary speaks of the presence of God. Outside the sanctuary he looks at evil without God, inside he views everything, and everyone, with God. What a difference this makes! Outside all had been viewed in relation to time, inside all is viewed in relation to eternity. The wickedness of men, the goodness of God, the prosperity of the sinners, and the sorrows of the saints are no more viewed in connection with the passing moment, but in relation to the great end to which all is moving Man — ever short-sighted — can take but a short view: God, with His far-reaching vision, sees the end from the beginning. It is true the Psalmist still views the evil of men, but now he views it with God, and at once the momentary prosperity and passing triumphs of the wicked fade from his view, and he sees instead the fearful end to which they are hastening.

This, however, is not all, for in the sanctuary we learn many truths. Thus it is that he discerns a second great truth that, though God apparently takes little notice of the prosperity of the wicked, or even the afflictions of the godly, yet actually God and His government are working behind all (verses 18-20). Thus he is brought to confess, "Thou didst set them in slippery places: Thou castedst them down into destruction . . . Thou shalt despise their image." It looked, indeed, as if the Psalmist had been in the slippery places, for had not his steps well nigh slipped? and on the other hand the wicked appeared to be firmly established on a rock, for did they not prosper in the

world and increase in riches? Actually the godly soul was on the rock though shaking; and the wicked were in slippery places, though prospering. Viewing the prosperity of the wicked apart from the sanctuary the godly man was cast down; viewing the wicked from the sanctuary he sees, that in the end, they will be cast down. Away from God the prosperity of the wicked appeared very real and lasting, in the sanctuary it was but an evil and passing dream. The sanctuary has, moreover, still deeper lessons for the soul. He has seen the true character and end of the wicked; he has discovered the government of God at work beneath things seen; now he must look beneath his outward walk and ways and learn the secrets of his own heart (verses 21, 22). The exercises come nearer home. If the sanctuary exposes the character of the sinner, it will also discover the hidden springs of evil in the heart of a saint. All is laid bare in the light of the sanctuary. "When my heart was in a ferment," he says, "then I was brutish and ignorant, I was as a beast before Thee" (verses 21, 22 N. Tr.). The brute beast acts without the slightest reference to God, and the saint is brought to own that if he leaves God out of his thoughts he will not only sink beneath what is proper to a natural man, but he will fall to the level of a beast.

Having plumbed the evil of his own heart, God can at once teach him brighter and happier lessons. For the sanctuary is a retired and sacred spot where the deep things of God can be unfolded to the soul. As indeed was the happy experience of another soul, in a later day, when she found the sanctuary of God in the presence of Jesus and, sitting at His feet, heard His word. The Psalmist has been led into the depths, he shall now ascend into the heights. He has learnt something of his own heart, and thus he is prepared to learn the heart of God. Never are we more ready to learn the goodness of His heart than when we have discovered the badness of our own hearts. The discovery of what is in us opens the way for the revelation of what is in Him. Hence the Psalmist’s thoughts are carried away from all that he had been before God to delight in all that God was for him. He can say, "I was as a beast before Thee, nevertheless I am continually with Thee." When hot and bitter thoughts were raging in his heart, even then he was the object of God’s unwearied care. He says, as it were, "God was out of my thoughts, but I was never out of His thoughts" — "I am continually with Thee."

Furthermore he not only had a place in the heart of God, but he was held by the hand of God, for he can say, "Thou hast holden me by my right hand." I wandered, I behaved like a brute, I let go of His hand, but never did He let go of mine. I well nigh slipped, yea, verily, I should altogether have slipped, but He held me by my right hand. His heart of love set me as an object before Him, and His hand of power held me fast.

Learning thus with great delight all that God had been for him in the past, in the day when his feet had well nigh slipped he can look on with the utmost confidence to all that God will be for him in the future. He can say in every step of the pilgrim journey, "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel." No need for me to weary my heart in seeking to unravel all the perplexing questions of my pathway through this evil world, for God Himself will guide me; and at last, when the end of the journey is reached, when man’s small day is done, and the day of glory dawns, "Thou wilt receive me" (verse 24)

Happy indeed for the saint who has so learned God in the secret of the sanctuary that he can say, His heart cares for me, His hand holds me, His wisdom guides me, and His glory will welcome me.

He who knows God thus has found in God the satisfying portion of his soul. Not only is he an object to God, but now God becomes the one Object to him. He can say, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee." But what about the prosperity of the wicked, their riches and their ease which once he had envied? "Oh," the Psalmist would say, "speak no more of those things, I have been into the sanctuary, I have learned the heart of God and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Him." As we sometimes sing: —

"I have seen the face of Jesus Tell me not of aught beside." But we may say, "You are evidently a poor weak thing in the midst of a world where all is against you." "I know it," the Psalmist seems to reply, "for I have learnt by bitter experience that my flesh and my heart faileth, for time was when my feet had well nigh slipped, but I have been into the sanctuary and I have found a resting-place for my poor trembling heart" — "God is the rock of my heart and my portion for ever" (verse 26, margin). The heart that was once envious of the wicked has found its satisfying portion in the heart of God. The feet that were almost gone are firmly set upon the rock.

Truly God is good to His people (verse 1); and it is good to draw near to God (verse 28); and the one who draws near to God becomes a witness before men. " I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all thy works."

S. Thou Remainest.

"Thou Remainest."

Hebrews 1:11-12;Hebrews 13:5-6,Hebrews 13:8.

Hamilton Smith (Extracted from Scripture Truth magazine, Volume 13, 1921, pages 73.) O Lord and Saviour, we recline On that eternal love of Thine, Thou art our rest, and Thou alone Remainest when all else is gone.

We look out upon a world that is perishing, where all things are waxing old. Over all we see the dark shadow of death, and that sooner or later death breaks up the happiest home on earth. We see how true it is that "the world passeth away." Then with tear-dimmed eyes we turn our gaze from this passing world, we look up through the opened heavens, and, at once we see "the glory of God, and JESUS," and faith delights to say to the Lord, "THOU REMAINEST." Our loved ones pass out of our sight, but He remains. Blessed indeed for all saints at all times to realize that He remains, but never more precious than when in the deep sorrow of bereavement — amid the break-up of earthly homes, and the wreck of earthly hopes — we can look up into His face and say, "Thou remainest." And as He looks down into our stricken hearts, with infinite compassion, He answers back, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." The first utterance of these comforting and sustaining words fell upon the ears of a saint about to face a journey. From the after history of that long journey we know by what rough ways it led, the sorrows it contained, the hardships it involved, and the trials it would bring, as well indeed its seasons of joy, its wholesome lessons, and its lasting gains. But in the mercy of the Lord no word is uttered to inform the patriarch Jacob of the character of the path. However, this indeed he does know — he knows the glorious end of the journey, for, says the Lord, "I will bring thee again into this land," and "In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." But he knows more. From the start of that journey until the last step which set his feet again in the promised land — he knows that he will never be forsaken, for says the Lord —

"I am with thee;"

"I will keep thee;"

"I will not leave thee." Nor is it otherwise with the Christian today. Yea, rather in a deeper way, and with richer meaning, can we appropriate such words of comfort. We too know the start of our pilgrim journey. We set out with the grace of God that has brought salvation.

We know the end of our journey, for grace begun will end in glory. The appearing of grace makes way for the appearing of glory. A glory in which we shall be like Christ, and with Christ for ever and ever. But between the start in grace and the end in glory there lies our pilgrim path through a hostile world of sin and sorrow. What that untrodden path may hold for us we know not. But this we do know, the Lord has said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." For our comfort and assurance this unconditional promise comes to us with all the absolute authority of His own word.

It is no prophet or apostle who speaks the word; no messenger from the Lord that brings it. No angel or archangel is equal to breathe such words of comfort into forlorn and sorrowing hearts. It is none other than the Lord Himself who draws near to us in our desolation, and with infinite tenderness, we hear Him say, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." The binding of broken hearts shall not be in other hands than His. No hands so tender, so gentle, so skilful, to bind a broken heart as the hands once bruised and pierced in love upon the tree. And seeing the Lord 'hath said', faith, rising above a world of sin and sorrow and death, can 'boldly say': "The Lord is my helper, I will not fear."

Moreover the One who breathes these words of comfort — has promised to be with us — is One who has been before us in the journey. He has trodden every step of the way. He has reached the glorious end, and appears in heaven itself before the face of God for us. He can say, as it were, to His sorrowing saints, "I have been before you in the way. I have trodden the path as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man," as "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." I know every turn in the road; I know the rough places and the smooth. There are hills to climb, dark valleys to tread, and rivers to cross, but I know them all. I have climbed the hills, I have trodden the valleys, I have forded the waters. I have passed through the last dark valley of the shadow of death, I have reached the home of glory, I have sat down at the right hand of God, and from My throne of glory I will sustain you, and succour you, and intercede for you as you journey on your way, and at last I will come for you and receive you to Myself, that where I am ye may be also. "I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of."

Moreover there is yet further comfort in the Lord for our sorrowing hearts. Not only can we look up and say, "Thou remainest," but we can add — "THOU ART THE SAME''.

Full well we know the way of this sorrowful world. As we look back over the passing years and recall the faces of many we have known and loved, are we not confronted with the sorrow that some have gone, and some have changed? But how does it lift our spirits above the sadness of such moments to look up and discover there is One who will never pass away and never change. As indeed we sometimes sing: —

"Earthly friends may fail or leave us One day soothe, the next day grieve us But this friend will ne'er deceive us, O, how He loves!" And just as the Lord's words, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," give the blessed answer to that sweet word, "Thou remainest," so will this last chapter of Hebrews supply the enlargement of that other touching word, " Thou art the same." For there we read, "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever." This tells us more than the word in the first chapter, comforting indeed as that is, for this seasonable word tells us not only that He is the same, but that He is the same in heaven to-day as He was on earth in the days that are past. His circumstances indeed have vastly changed. Yesterday He-was the poor and needy Man, the homeless Man, the Stranger with not where to lay His head. To-day He has resumed royalty and majesty in heavenly glory. He has laid aside for ever the garments of humiliation, He has put on the majestic robes of glory in suitability to that place of glory. But though He has changed His circumstance, He has not changed His heart. Many crowns are His, and we delight to crown Him Lord of all; but no crowns that will ever adorn His head will ever change His heart. The love that could weep with Martha and Mary has not changed one whit. The heart that had compassion on the widow of Nain still beats in sympathy with sorrowing saints. The tender love

that sustained the broken-hearted Jairus can still say with infinite compassion to a broken-hearted saint, "Be not afraid, only believe."

Chapter 92

S. Three Women.

Three Women.

Ruth 1:1-22.

Hamilton Smith.

(From An outline of Sound Words, Vol. 3, also in Scripture Truth Vol. 42, 1965-7, pages 209-14.) The incidents recorded in the opening chapter of the Book of Ruth, though taking place in a time long past, and in circumstances very different to those of today, are rich with instruction, warning, and encouragement for believers of every age.

These incidents are connected with three women. First, in the story of Naomi, we see a backsliding saint, and the gracious way the Lord takes to bring about restoration. In the case of Orpah we have the solemn warning of one who makes a fair profession of godliness, but in the end turns back to the world. Lastly, in the story of Ruth we are encouraged by the example of one who, not only makes a fair profession but, to use our Christian language, bears all the marks that accompany salvation. To enter into the full significance of the stories of these three women, it is necessary to recall the character of the day in which they lived. From the first verse of the chapter we learn that these incidents took place "In the days when the judges ruled." The solemn character of those days is summed up in the closing verse of the previous book.

There we read, "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes." Moses, when instructing the people as to their conduct after they had come into possession of the Land, definitely said, "Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes" (Deuteronomy 12:8). Three hundred years after this warning we find the people in the Land, but, according to the records of the closing chapters of Judges, in a low moral condition marked by gross corruption and violence. This low condition is traced back to two causes. First, they had cast off the authority of God as their King; secondly, as a result, every man was doing that which was right in his own eyes. They were thus marked by the casting off of Divine authority, on the one hand, and the assertion of human independence, on the other.

It is very obvious that all the misery and confusion in the world to-day spring from the same causes. The throwing off of Divine authority, and the assertion of self-will, are working havoc in the political world, the social circle, and the family life. Rulers, masters, and parents, give up the fear of God; subjects, servants and children increasingly act in self-willed independency. The world, however, is not our direct concern. That which should give us the deepest exercise is the solemn fact that the same principles which are bringing the world to ruin, have already brought about the ruin of the Church in responsibility. Moreover, to come closer home, even amongst those who have sought to walk in separation from the corruptions of Christendom, how often the same evils have led to scattering and division. We have not been true to Christ as the Head of His body — we have failed in holding the Head — with the result we have done that which is right in our own eyes.

The instant we cease to hold the Head — to draw all our needed supply of grace, wisdom, and power, from Christ the ascended Head of the body, the Church — it can be said of us, in the language of the times of the Judges, we have "no King." The inevitable result follows, that we fall back on our own resources and do that which we judge to be right in our own eyes. We may be very sincere, very religious, and very active in good works, but, if we are doing what we judge to be right in our own eyes, we are acting in independency of our Risen Head. The first result of giving up the direct authority of the Lord, and acting in independency, is to bring about a famine amongst the people of God. Se we read, "there was a famine in the land." The very land that should have been, according to God's promise, a land of plenty, flowing with milk and honey, had become a land of famine. Alas! have we not to admit that again there is a famine amongst the people of God, and for the same reasons. We have failed to give Christ His place as the Head of His body — he One Who is the source of all spiritual supply, whereby he body "maketh increase . . unto the edifying of itself love." As ever, a time of famine is a time of testing. It costs us little to be identified with the people of God when outwardly everything is prosperous. But when difficulties arise and conflicts have to be faced, when weakness becomes manifest, then the reality of our faith is put to the test.

Under the pressure of trial some may turn aside from God's path for His people, as in the case of Naomi; the empty profession of others is exposed, as in the case of Orpah, while, with others the very trial becomes an occasion to manifest their devotedness to the Lord, as so blessedly illustrated in the story of Ruth.

1 — NAOMI. In the days, then, of Naomi such was the low condition of God's people that there was a famine in God's Land. Elimelech, her husband, lacking in the faith that looks to God in trial, turns aside from the Land of Jehovah to seek relief in the land of Moab, taking with him his wife and two sons. In Scripture the different countries that surround Jehovah's Land are used as types of the world in different aspects. Egypt speaks of the gross world in which man seeks to gratify his lusts, Babylon of the world in which man seeks to exalt himself by a corrupt religion. The prophet Jeremiah tells us that "Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel" (Jeremiah 48:11). Thus Moab represents the world in its ease where one can escape the conflict entailed in fighting the good fight of faith.

To-day, when those who have escaped the gross world of Egypt, and the corrupt religious world of Babylon, are faced with famine and conflict amongst the people of God, the world in the form typified by Moab becomes a sore temptation. Many a saint, since the days of Elimelech, harassed and wearied with strife and conflict, has given up God's ground for His people to seek a life of ease in some quiet circle which tries nobody's conscience and allows of everybody's will.

Thus we read of Elimelech, his wife, Naomi and their two sons, that "they came into the country of Moab," and, what is yet more solemn, we read, they "Continued there." In spite, however, of its promise of ease and quiet and rest, it proved but a place of sorrow and loss for the children of God. Moab, with its green hills and dales, looked very attractive, but Elimelech has to learn that " There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Proverbs 16:25). Thus it came to pass that Elimelech, who sought to escape death by famine in the Land of Jehovah, walks into the arms of death in the land of Moab. To take a false step to avoid trouble will oftentimes lead into the very trouble we seek to avoid.

Following upon the death of Elimelech, the two sons marry strange wives of the land of Moab. Ten years pass away, and then death lays its hand upon the two sons. Naomi, bereft of her husband and sons, is left a lonely woman in a strange land. Leaving the Land of God to escape the trials of a famine, she has found in the land of Moab only bitterness and sorrow. At this point in the story of Naomi we pass from the solemn warnings as to the failure of a saint to the rich instruction in the restoring grace of the Lord. Naomi had wandered from the Land of Jehovah, and come under the chastening of the Lord. If, however, the Lord chastens it is for our blessing, to bring us back to Himself, and the circle of His own people, in His own land. Thus there comes a moment in the history of Naomi when we read "She arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the country of Moab." But what led her to return? It was not the sorrows of the land of Moab, but the good news that she heard concerning the Land of Jehovah. It was not the want and misery of the far country that drove the prodigal from that land of sin, it was the realisation of the plenty in the Father's house that drew him home, for he said, "In my Father's house there is bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger, I will arise and go to my Father." So, in the history of Naomi, when she heard "that the LORD had visited His people in giving them bread . . . she went forth out of the place where she was . . . to return unto the land of Judah." Our sin may harden our hearts and drive us still farther from the Lord; but the thought of His grace breaks our hearts and draws us back to Himself. It is "the thought of Jesu's love Lifts our poor hearts this weary world above."

Further, we see very blessedly set forth in the story of Naomi that restoration to the Lord is rightly followed by reception among the Lord's people. Thus we read, "It came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them." How is it that there is so little restoration today? May it not be that too often the people of God are so little moved about the wanderers? May the Lord give us to taste a little more of the compassion of His heart that led Him to go after a wandering sheep until He found it.

Then, as we listen to the words of Naomi we shall see every mark of a restored soul, and learn some home truths as to the sorrow of backsliding. First, Naomi says, "The Almighty hath dealt . . . with me" (v. 20). It would seem that for ten long years she had ceased to have any dealings with the Lord, but the Lord had not ceased to deal with her. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as sons" (Hebrews 12:6-7).

Secondly, she says, not only that the Lord had dealt with her, but, that He had dealt with her "very bitterly." If the Lord deals with us in our backslidings we shall find that "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."

Thirdly, Naomi says, "I went out" (v. 21). She exhibits the true mark of a restored soul by taking all the blame for departing from Jehovah's Land. As a matter of fact the story tells us that it was Elimelech who "went out." He took the lead; but Naomi does not attempt to shelter herself by blaming her husband. She does not say the circumstances were so trying, and the pressure was so great that I could not help turning aside. Ah no! she owns as we all must own that the secret cause of all our wanderings is not in the failure of others, or the pressure of circumstances, but in ourselves.

Fourthly, she owns that the Lord had brought her back. She owns that she went out but it was the Lord that brought back. Left to ourselves, as backsliders, none of us would ever come back if the Lord did not bring us back. So David can say, "He restoreth my soul."

Fifthly, she does not simply say that the Lord brought me back, but "the LORD hath brought me home again." When He brings back it is not to some half-way house but right back into the warmth and love of the home circle. When the Shepherd picked up His wandering sheep, He laid it on His shoulders and we read, "when He cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost." Blessed be His Name, nothing less than His home will do for His sheep.

Sixthly, nevertheless there is a solemn confession that Naomi has to make. If the Lord brought her home, she has to own that "the Lord hath brought me home again empty." "I went out full" she says, and the Lord brought me back, but He brought me back empty. All the days of our wanderings are days in which we make no spiritual growth, though they may, indeed, be days when we are stripped of everything that hinders spiritual progress.

Seventhly, there is one other exceedingly comforting truth, for every restored soul, that shines out in Naomi's history. We read that the time of her return was "in the beginning of barley harvest." If the Lord brings us back empty, He takes care to bring us back to plenty.

Thus, in the story of Naomi there passes before us the sorrows of a backsliding saint; the gracious dealings of the Lord in restoration, and the reception of the restored saint amongst the Lord's people.

2. — ORPAH. In the brief allusion to Orpah we see the sorrowful case of one who makes a fair profession and yet lacks every vital link with God and His people. It is solemn to see how far nature can go in making a fair profession, even as the Apostle Paul warned us that in these last days there will be many who have "the form of godliness, but deny the power thereof."

We see the form of godliness strikingly set forth in Orpah. First, she identified herself with Naomi, a true believer. We read both of Ruth and Orpah that they went "with her," and again, "they went on the way" (v. 7). It looked as if Orpah had made a clean cut with her old life, and had started for Immanuel's Land.

Then the test comes: Orpah has opportunity to return. Naomi says, "Go, return each to her mother's house." This calls forth the fact that Orpah was marked by a great deal of nice natural feeling, for we read, "They lifted up their voice and wept." Indeed, it looked as if Orpah was going to pass the test, for she appears to make a very definite decision to cast in her lot with Naomi and the people of God, for she joins with Ruth in saying, " Surely, we will return with thee unto thy people." Moreover, she is not lacking in natural affection, for we read, "Orpah kissed her mother-in-law " (vv. 9 10, 14).

Nevertheless, in spite of her identification with Naomi in spite of her tears, her fair words, and her kisses, she returns to her people, her gods, and her land, and we hear no more of Orpah. Her profession was fair; she had the form of godliness, but she lacked the power of godliness — simple faith in God.

3. — RUTH. In striking contrast to Orpah we have the touching story of Ruth. Like Orpah she leaves the land of Moab; she identifies herself with Naomi. She, too, is moved to tears, and makes a definite decision. But, in contrast to Orpah, she exhibits all the marks that accompany salvation. We remember that in a solemn passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Apostle warns us that we may be "enlightened," and taste of the blessedness of heavenly things, and even partake of the outward privileges of the Christian circle in which the Holy Spirit dwells, and yet apostatise, and thus prove we have no vital link with Christ. But, speaking of those to whom he is writing, he says, "We are persuaded better things of you, and things which accompany salvation." Then he presents three of these things, "Love" "Hope," and "Faith" (Hebrews 6:9-12). Very blessedly we see that Ruth is marked by these three things.

First, in simple and beautiful "faith" she turns her back on her native land to travel to Jehovah's Land. She accepts the pilgrim path, for she says, "Whither thou goest, I will go." She takes the place of a stranger with no certain home, for she says, "Where thou lodgest I will lodge." She identifies herself with the people of God as she says, "Thy people shall be my people," and expresses her confidence in God, as she adds, "Thy God" shall be "My God." Moreover she is marked by devoted love. Orpah may indeed kiss Naomi, but of Ruth we read, she "clave unto her." Further, she says, "Where thou diest I will die, and there will I be buried." Lastly, she was marked by "hope," for we read, "She was stedfastly minded to go." As it were, in the light of another world, she gave up the present world. To nature it might appear that Ruth was acting with the utmost folly. She gives up her home, her kindred, and her country; and identifies herself with a broken-down old woman, to go to a Land she has never seen and a people of whom she has no personal knowledge. To reason and sight this seems madness, even as to-day it may appear great folly to identify oneself with the poor, and foolish, and weak things of this world, and to leave the great religious world, to share the reproach of Christ outside the camp. But "it doth not yet appear what we shall be." Only faith that looks on to the glorious end can take such a path. The start that Ruth made in company with an aged. lonely, and desolate woman was only the beginning of the story: in the end she will appear as the Bride of the mighty Boaz: and yet more wonderful her name shall be for ever enshrined in the genealogy of our Lord. In the light of her after history, who will say that she made a mistake when she threw in her lot with the aged Naomi? Orpah, who chose the world and its ease, passes into oblivion; Ruth who turned her back on the world passes on to honour and glory. In our day let us remember that the path of suffering, reproach and shame that, in different measures, will be the lot of those who follow a rejected Christ may look very foolish in the eyes of the world; but faith knows that it will end in the great day of the marriage of the Lamb. So that we may say in the words of the saintly Rutherford. "There is a long chain of God's ways, counsels, decrees, actions, events, judgments, mercies; and there is white and black, good and evil, crooked and straight, interwoven in this web; and the links of the chain, partly gold, partly brass, iron, and clay, and the threads of this dispensation, go along the patriarchs' days . . . through the generations of the prophets, . . . the apostles, persecuting emperors, and martyrdoms of the witnesses of Jesus, slain by the woman drunken with the blood of saints, till the end of the thread and last link of the chain be tied to the very day of THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB."

Oh day of wondrous promise! The Bridegroom and the bride Are seen in glory ever: And love is satisfied.

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