

PROFITABLE PORTIONS FOR THE LORD'S DAY

by James Smith

Smith's Sunday meditations on Scripture designed to enlighten understanding, stir affections, regulate will, purify conscience, and guide life, focusing on God's goodness despite apparent injustice in the world.

43 Chapters

Table of Contents

1. 00 Profitable Portions For the Lord's Day
2. 01 Almost Gone!
3. 02 The Rest
4. 03 Knowledge Promised
5. 04 Abiding in Christ
6. 05 God's Knowledge of Us
7. 06 A Serious Inquiry
8. 07 Christ's Estimate of His Church
9. 08 A Testimony
10. 09 Redemption from the Curse
11. 10 RENEWAL
12. 11 The Spirit of Faith
13. 12 Yet They Are Your People
14. 13 PERPLEXITY
15. 14 Direction For the Perplexed
16. 15 A Solemn Thought
17. 16 The Savior's Requirements
18. 17 The Spirit of Christ
19. 18 Holiness Unto the Lord
20. 19 The Depths
21. 19 The Value and Use of Blood
22. 20 Mercy Inviting the Backslider
23. 21 The Christian's Walk
24. 22 Mercy and Salvation Sought
25. 23 Affliction Regarded
26. 24 The Place to Choose
27. 25 Hezekiah's Prayer
28. 26 The Antidote to Fear
29. 27 Belief in Trouble
30. 28 The Believer's Dignity
31. 29 Jesus in His Garden
32. 30 The Design of Christ's Coming
33. 31 Present Privileges and Future Prospects
34. 32 A Purifying Hope
35. 33 The Blessed Man
36. 34 Behold the Man!
37. 35 God's Design in Revealing Sin
38. 36 Preservation Sought
39. 37 The Final Testimony

- 40. 38 Mourning Ended
- 41. 39 The Indispensable Evidence
- 42. 40 Individual Duty
- 43. 41 Converse With the Past

00 Profitable Portions For the Lord's Day

Profitable Portions For the Lord's Day Designed to Help the Faith, and Comfort the Hearts of the Lord's People. By James Smith, 1865

Some readers of "The Believer's Daily Remembrancer" have wished that the portions for the Lord's Day had been longer. The present work is designed to meet the wishes of such. Many of the Lord's people are occasionally detained at home, on the Lord's Day, by sickness, domestic duties, or distance from the house of God; and others do not go out in the afternoon of that day. This little book is intended to be useful to them. My object is to lead the mind . . .

from SELF — to Jesus;

from sin — to salvation;

from the troubles of life — to the comforts of the gospel. My aim is . . .

to humble the sinner — and exalt the Savior;

to strip the creature — and place the crown on the head of God's free grace!

I cannot ascribe too much to Jesus — or too little to man! Our God who works all our works in us, and all our works for us, deserves all the praise; and just in proportion as we experience the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts — do we cheerfully give Him all the glory.

Reader, expect no profit from the mere reading of this book, for if it could speak it would say, "It is not in me!" It may be a means of doing you good — but if so, it will be, because the Holy Spirit works by it. He frequently uses weak and feeble things, to effect His great and glorious purposes; He has used the former productions of the author's pen — may He graciously condescend to use this.

If you would desire benefit from it — read it with prayer! Look up and beseech the Holy Spirit to apply what you read; and if He condescends to bring it home with demonstration and power to your heart — it will prove a real blessing.

Everlasting, ever-living, and ever-blessed God — condescend to bless this feeble production to sinners. May it bring some souls to the Savior, and build up and comfort many of Your poor, tried, and troubled people. Put life, put power into it — that Jesus may be honored by it, and Your saints bless Your holy name for it. To Your blessing it is commended, under Your patronage may it circulate, and by Your grace may it prove extensively useful. Amen.

James Smith, 1865

01 Almost Gone!

Almost Gone!

"But as for me — my feet were almost gone! My steps had well near slipped!" Psalms 73:2

Asaph appears, in his own mind, to have been going over the history of the Lord's people in general, and of some of them in particular; tracing out the Lord's dealings with them, and marking his peculiar interventions for them. Full of this subject, he commences his Psalm rather abruptly, exclaiming, "Truly God is good to Israel — even to such as are pure of heart." Good, incomparably good, had He been to Israel literally, and to all the pure, or true hearted, among them. But His goodness shines even brighter still, in His dealings with His spiritual Israel. How good, how infinitely good . . .

to choose them to eternal life in His beloved Son,
to predestine them to the adoption of children,
to redeem them from death by His precious blood,
to preserve them in the days of their unregeneracy,
to quicken and call them by His Holy Spirit,
to speak to them in His Word,
and to work for them by His providence.

Yes, God has been good, and is good to Israel; even to such as have had their hearts cleansed from guilt — by the blood of Jesus, and from filth — by His Spirit and Word. Being pure-hearted, the hands are washed in innocency, pure paths are chosen, pure companions are selected, and pure conversation is enjoyed.

Asaph's attention had also been directed to himself, and while he marked their course, he compared it with his own, and as he reviewed his narrow escapes, and sinful propensities, he exclaimed, "But as for me — my feet were almost gone! My steps had well near slipped!"

He had been in GREAT DANGER. Judging by the eye, misled him. He saw the wicked — healthy, wealthy, and prosperous; while some of the Lord's people — were sick, poor, and in adversity. Envy arose in his heart, and began powerfully to work. He began to think that it was folly to obey God, and observe His precepts. A spirit of complaining was produced, and he reflected upon the conduct of his God. At length he went to the Sanctuary — there his mistakes were corrected, his mind was enlightened, and his actual fall prevented. He was almost gone! His steps had nearly slipped! He had only narrowly escaped! In looking back, how often has this been the case with us. But there are special periods, and some particular spots, which remind us, how near we were to a shameful fall. O this, ALMOST! This, well near! How vividly they bring before us past scenes, and

past seasons.

We can remember what danger we were in, from peculiar temptations. Satan studied our constitution, and prepared his temptation accordingly. It perfectly matched the lusts of our flesh, and natural bent of our sinful desires. It so exactly suited, was so calculated to make us fall — that we were almost gone.

Then, it was so adapted to our circumstances. Satan always observes the circumstances of the Lord's people, when he prepares his traps for them. He has temptations for sickness — and health, for poverty — and wealth, for cheerfulness — and gloom. As every constitution has its suitable temptation — just so has every circumstance in the believers life. Besides which, Satan plies his temptations with such power and perseverance. How he does this — we cannot understand; but that it does so — we cannot doubt. An infernal spirit often acts upon the human spirit. It suggests, it excites, it tempts, and, alas! how often it prevails! When the temptation to sin, and the opportunity to commit the sin meet — the conflict is fearful, and the result sometimes shameful! When the wine sparkled before the eye of Noah — he was tempted and fell. When Bathsheba's beauty met the eye of David — he was tempted and fell. When the damsel charged Peter — he was tempted and fell. And there have been times in our history when solicitation to sin, an inclination for sin, and the opportunity to commit sin — have met together — and we were almost gone! If special grace had not been given to us — we would have surely fallen.

We can remember too our danger when our corruptions have been powerfully stirred up. Satan is allowed to do this sometimes — and then every evil that lies hidden in the heart begins to show itself! Corruptions we would be ashamed to mention, and afraid to name — are found working furiously within us! O what awful thoughts of God then! O what fearful cogitations then! Flood seems to follow flood, billow follows billow; until it is almost impossible to believe that there can be any true grace in our hearts! The cable strains, the anchor drags, the masts crack, and the sails flap fearfully — we are tossed with tempests and not comforted. We seem just ready to make shipwreck of faith, and of a good conscience. Our feet are almost gone! Our steps are well near slipped! Our resistance is nearly overcome. Like one walking on ice — every moment we expect to fall prostrate. Like one going down a steep plane, it appears almost impossible to stop. At times, all seems to be over, and disgrace now, with destruction by-and-bye, seem certain.

O the scenes of danger we have passed through! O the hair-breadth escapes we have had! There seemed to be but a step, and scarcely that, between us and the awful precipice, the shameful fall! Many, many times, we have been almost gone — and yet have never fallen yet. What mercy, what rich, free, and undeserved mercy this! But Asaph had not only been in great danger, he had also experienced, A Merciful Deliverance. A father's eye was over him! The Lord was observing him. Just so with us. Our God has ever had His eye on us — and His arm around us! "The eyes of the Lord, run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong on the behalf of all those whose hearts are perfect towards Him." O the mercy, to have God's eye watching us; and His ear open to listen to us! With David, we can say, "When I cried: 'My foot slips!' Your mercy, O God, held me up." The Lord bounds the temptations of His people. So far — but no farther, may Satan go. He may tempt us — but he shall not triumph over us; or if he does for a time, the triumphing of this wicked one shall be short. Our Heavenly Father bounds the time, the force, and the number of our temptations. We may think them peculiar strong, and seem to be encircled by them, and

conclude that they must crush us. But no, thus says the Word, "No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to humanity. God is faithful, and He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation He will also provide a way of escape so that you are able to bear it!" This has hitherto been the case with us, we were almost gone — but not quite. Our steps had well near slipped — but we were preserved from falling. Every saint is in God's own keeping. "I will keep it night and day." These are the Lord's own words, and they are true and faithful. "I lift my eyes toward the mountains. Where will my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of Heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to slip; your Protector will not slumber. Indeed, the Protector of Israel does not slumber or sleep. The Lord protects you; the Lord is a shelter right by your side. The sun will not strike you by day or the moon by night. The Lord will protect you from all harm; He will protect your life. The Lord will protect your coming and going both now and forever!" Psalms 121:1-8 The Lord our God will continue to work for us — as He has in the past. He works IN us — by His Holy Spirit; and He works FOR us — by His special providence. And the inward work of the Spirit, and the outward work of divine providence — conspire to preserve us from falling. Blessed be God, He watches over us, bounds our temptations, keeps us as the apple of the eye, and works for us. Here is our safety. That is the reason, that though our feet were almost gone, and our steps had well near slipped — we can say of our enemies, "They are cast down and fallen — but we are risen and stand upright."

Brethren, thus so dangerously circumstanced — we had need take heed; with such corruptions within us, such an enemy without us, and such a slippery path beneath us — great caution is necessary. Therefore the Apostle exhorts, "Let him that thinks he stands take heed — lest he fall. "Watch and pray — lest you enter into temptation," is the caution of our Divine Master also.

We should also feel our dependence. We need a wiser head, and a stronger arm than our own — to keep us! If the Lord had not been on our side — long before now, Satan would have surely prevailed against us. The ivy does not more need the oak, the vine does not more need the wall, the infant does not more need the parents arm — than we need the powerful support of our gracious God. Our daily prayer should be "Hold me up — and I shall be safe!"

We should be found in the posture of the spouse, of whom it was inquired, "Who is this, that comes up out of the wilderness, leaning on her beloved." We should walk humbly. Leaning on another's arm, guided by another's eye, and kept by another's power — surely humility befits us. The humbler — the safer. The humble cleave to Jesus, and fear to leave His side.

Leave Him, and like Dinah — you will find some Shechem too strong for you, and will have to return to your home dishonored and disgraced!

We should give God the glory of our preservation. Our feet were almost gone, and but for His timely intervention — they would have been quite gone! Where, O where might we have been this day — but for the Lord's faithful care? He was mindful of us, and He will bless us. We have been kept, we are preserved — but "Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Your name goes all the glory for Your unailing love and faithfulness!"

02 The Rest

The Rest "There remains therefore a rest for the people of God." Hebrews 4:9 These was a rest for Adam in Paradise — which he lost by sin.

There was a rest for Israel in Canaan — which many forfeited by unbelief.

There is a rest for the Christian in Christ — which can only be enjoyed by faith. And there is a rest for all the saints in Heaven — to which we can only be admitted at death. To one of the two last, the Apostle refers; some think to the former, and some to the latter. We shall consider the words as referring to Heaven:

our Father's house,

our Savior's home, and

our eternal dwelling-place! To the weary and way-worn — there is something delightful in the thought of REST, and they love to think of Heaven as the place where they shall "rest from their labors."

REST gives us the idea of . . .

repose — the calm, quiet repose of the soul;

refreshment — the refreshment of the exhausted spirit after conflict, sickness, or toil;

restoration to vigor — after debility, lassitude, and fainting.

Heaven will be a rest . . .

from sin — which will no more grieve us;

from sorrow — which will no more trouble and distress us;

from fears — which will no more harass and perplex us; and

from conflicts — which will no more agitate and suppress us.

It will be a rest . . .

with God in his glory,

with Jesus in his immediate presence,

with saints and holy angels in full perfection and blessedness. This rest is FUTURE — it remains for the people of God. This rest is the object of our hope and DESIRE. We look forward to it, with holy longing and cheering anticipations. This rest is PERFECT — free from all mixture of anything that will agitate, give pain, or cause grief. This rest is UNINTERRUPTED — nothing will ever occur to disturb, distress, or agitate us more. This rest is GLORIOUS — as bright as the meridian sun,

as balmy as the most pleasant morning, as glowing with holiness, splendor, and majesty. This rest is ETERNAL — and this is best of all. The possibility of a change, of a return to former scenes — would spoil all. But that rest will be enduring — as changeless as the Divine nature, and as glorious as the Divine perfections.

Blessed be God for such a rest for the weary, suffering, and downcast believer in Jesus! Oh, to keep the eye fixed upon it, and the heart expecting it — amidst all the troubles and trials of time! This rest is FOR the redeemed people of God. Not for the Jews as such, nor for the Gentiles as such — but for the Lord's people. The people He has chosen for himself, as says the Apostle, "God has chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." The people He claims as his own, being set apart for himself in his eternal purpose, redeemed to God by the blood of his Son, out of every nation, country, people, and tongue. He claims them by his Holy Spirit in the day of his power. The people whom He himself teaches, as Jesus said, "It is written in the prophets — they shall be all taught of God, everyone therefore that has heard and learned of the Father, comes unto Me." Divine teaching is educating for eternity, and God thus educates all his own people. The people He prepares — for Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. Jesus is gone to prepare the place for the people — and the Holy Spirit comes to prepare the people for the place. To this end, He creates them anew in Christ Jesus, and makes them fit to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.

They are now a poor, tried, tempted, and restless people; strangers and pilgrims upon the earth, as all their fathers were.

Satan tempts them,

sinners try them,

fears harass them,

Providence perplexes them,

and they often cry out, "O that I had wings like a dove, then would I fly away and be at rest!"

Believer, let the prospect of this eternal glorious rest, cheer you in toil and trouble! Your work will soon be finished, your trouble will soon come to an end, and then the rest — the glorious rest, remains for you! Let it encourage you to labor and suffer: labor for Jesus, who is preparing the rest for you; suffer in the cause of Jesus, acquiescing in his will who once suffered for you, and now rests as you will soon.

Think of the Hebrew believers — what they suffered, and how they suffered; they "joyfully accepted the confiscation of their property, because they knew that they had better and lasting possessions."

Let your Heavenly rest, quicken your pace homewards! You are going to a rest — a perfect, uninterrupted, and eternal rest; a rest in Heaven, a rest with Jesus, a rest in the presence of your God forever; therefore gird up the loins of your mind, and press on towards the mark, cheered by the prospect at the end of the race.

Remember, Christian, this rest is SECURE, for Jesus has taken possession of it for you. "I am going," said He, "to prepare a place for you." "Where," said the Apostle, alluding to Heaven, "Where the forerunner has for us entered, even Jesus." Yes, Jesus is gone there for you, He has taken possession in your name, He is preparing your place, and will soon come and receive you to himself!

Remember too, that it is NEAR — very near. Perhaps much nearer than you may think.

You may be sighing, sorrowing, striving, wrestling, doubting, fearing, and cast down today — and tomorrow you may be in your Heavenly rest!

Today, you may be lying like Lazarus, at the rich man's gate, full of sores; tomorrow, you may be in Heaven!

Today, you may be dwelling in Mesech, or in the tents of Kedar; tomorrow, you may be basking in the beams of Immanuel's glory!

Today, you may be on the bed of sickness, suffering, and pain; tomorrow, you may be in the presence of Jesus, where there is no more pain, neither sorrow nor crying! Who can tell how near we all are to our Heavenly and everlasting rest?

Remember also, that your very trials, toils, and sufferings here on earth, may SWEETEN your rest to you! And that soon, very soon — you may be rejoicing over your present sorrows, and praising God for what now fills you with grief and sadness. Things will look very different there — from what they do here. Never, never forget, then, in your darkest nights, in your most trying days, in the midst of every storm and tempest, when passing over burning sands and under a scorching sky — that there remains a rest for the people of God, and a rest for you!

"Arise and depart; for this is not your resting place, because it is defiled, it is ruined, beyond all remedy!"

"There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary are at rest!"

But, "there is NO REST, says my God, to the WICKED!" His soul is restless now, and, dying as he is — he will be restless forever. "And the smoke of their torment rises forever and ever. There is no rest day or night!" O think of an eternity of unrest! Think of an eternity of toil, agony, and woe! Think, and so think as to accept and act upon the invitation of Jesus, who is now at this moment saying unto you, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest; take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart, and you shall find rest unto your souls!"

03 Knowledge Promised

Knowledge Promised "What I am doing you do not understand now; but you shall know hereafter." John 13:7 The Lord teaches us not only by His words — but by His works. He taught His disciples by what He did — as well as by what He said. He was now teaching them humility and love — and in order to do so, He condescended to wash their feet. Peter was amazed, and said, "Lord, are You going to wash my feet?" He could not think of letting his Lord stoop to such menial employment in reference to himself. But he did not read his Lord's design — he could not see the deep and tender love of his Lord's heart. Jesus said to him, "What I am doing you do not understand now; but you shall know hereafter." The present shall be explained in the future. Be satisfied to believe that I am acting wisely and kindly, and the whole shall be made plain bye-and-bye. Thus our Lord seems to speak to us at times. He requires faith now, and promises us clear knowledge hereafter. Observe.

First, the work of Jesus may for a time perplex us. He is the great worker in providence. His hand is everywhere working — though it is not everywhere seen. The hand of Jesus is in all that happens to us. Yes, in reference to our trials — we may say of Him with Hezekiah, "He Himself has done this!"

He strips us, just as He does the trees in autumn, when the sap sinks, and the foliage withers and falls.

He stripped Lot — and brought him out of Sodom poor and desolate!

He stripped Job — and left him for a time barren and leafless!

He stripped Naomi — and she who went out full, returned empty!

He has stripped many of His people — and laid them bare!

He disappoints us. Our expectations are raised by men, or by circumstances; we fondly believe that good and great things will result from a connection, or an undertaking. But our hopes and our expectations are blown away like leaves a tree, when blasted by a strong wind! "You expected much — but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home — I blew away!" Haggai 1:9

He humbles us. Stripped and disappointed, at first we think He deals harshly with us. We complain of instruments, or events. Like the sons of Zeruiah — we look only at Shimei cursing; not like David — at the Lord bidding Shimei to curse David (2 Samuel 16:10). This produces hard thoughts, rebellious feelings, and a murmuring spirit.

One weight is laid on after another, until the spirit bends and we lay prostrate in the dust. At length the Holy Spirit breathes upon us, our graces revive, our sight is cleared, and we are not only humbled by the force of external circumstances — but we are truly humble in soul, as the effect of His grace.

Providence, that is — Jesus by His providence, often deeply tries us, fills us with perplexity — and we become bewildered, then He whispers, "What I am doing you do not understand now; but you shall know hereafter."

Jesus is the great worker in grace, as in providence, and here His work at times is no less trying. Instead of, as we hoped — carrying on His work by comforting, assuring, and sensibly upholding us; He reveals to us more and more the foulness, depravity, and awful wickedness of our own hearts! Turn the eye inward, He says, "See what Israel does in the dark, every man in the room of his idols!" Again and again, He bids us turn, and at every turn we discover some fresh abomination, some unexpected lust, some foul principle at work!

He empties us of all our false hope, vain confidence, fleshly assurance, and supposed excellency! And the heart appears to be a wilderness, void, and barren. Every evidence at times is concealed, every grace appears withered — and only lust and corruption remains!

Thus He exercises us — and sharp indeed, at times, the exercise is! We never expected it. Perhaps we were not warned of it. Or if we heard others speak of it — we never thought that it would be so with ourselves. But thus He destroys spiritual pride — causes our graces to root in Himself and His Word — and brings us, not only to be willing to be saved by grace — but to see and feel that we can be saved in no other way — and bless Him from the depth of our souls for a gratuitous salvation!

Tried believer, tempted Christian, Jesus says to you, as He said to Peter, "What I am doing you do not understand now; but you shall know hereafter!" Observe,

Secondly, the promise of Jesus should encourage us. We shall know hereafter. At present — He works in the dark, for the darkness and the light are both alike to Him. He has made no mistake in anything He has done. He has not caused us one needless pang — though we have caused ourselves many.

He works wisely and kindly — when He works invisibly. He assigns no reason for His actions. If we complain or repine — He seems to say to us, as to Job, "Should it be according to your mind?" This silences us, for we dare not say it should. The time to assign His reasons to us — is not now; but now is the time to expect faith of us.

He often acts contrary to sense — and contrary to our carnal expectations. We had, perhaps, laid down a plan for Him to work by — and He goes just opposite to it!

He crosses our wills — to sanctify our minds and hearts!

He opposes our foolish schemes — to execute His own wise and gracious designs!

He promises to make all plain by-and-by. The revealing day will come. It may soon be here, therefore let us patiently wait, and hopefully anticipate it. We shall then know the nature of what He does; and see that all is gracious, wise, and kind. We shall then know the needs be for all that He does — for all is necessary for our present good, or future welfare.

We shall know the design of what He does — that it was to humble us and prove us, to purify and perfect us; to exalt His own name, illustrate His own character, and glorify His Father's grace. We

shall know and feel fully satisfied — for all difficulties will be completely cleared up. We shall know and be filled with admiration at the wisdom, perfection, and prudence of all He did! We shall know and praise Him for working it all, for working as He did — and for concealing the design He had in view while He was thus trying us!

Beloved, though we do not understand now — what Jesus is doing; we shall assuredly know hereafter! And this calls for PATIENCE — we must wait for His revealing, when all will be made clear to us. At present we have need of patience, we are required to have patience; and if we can have patience with anyone, surely we may with Jesus! Can He do wrong? Impossible, for all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are in Him! Can He act unkindly? Impossible, for His heart is love, and the bruised reed He will not break, and the smoking flax He will not quench! Can He make a mistake? Impossible, for He only fulfills the thing that is appointed for us, and many such things are with Him!

"We shall know hereafter!" This assurance calls for submission; meek, uncomplaining, loving submission. There should be no complaining, no repining, no wishing — for our wishes spring from our ignorance, selfishness, or opposition to God. This calls for FAITH — strong, steady, quiet faith — faith in His promises, which must all be made good, and are being fulfilled by our very trials and troubles! This calls for faith in His attributes and perfections, which are all combined and engaged, to secure our present and everlasting welfare. Faith in His presence — for He is with us when we see Him not, feel Him not, think not of Him. He is with us — to prevent evil. He is with us — to do us good. He is with us — to cause all, and everything to work together for our good.

It calls for SILENCE! Do not attempt no explanation at present — but be willing to leave it, and quietly wait until the Lord comes. His Word to us now is, "Be still — and know that I am God." His promise respecting the future is, "You shall know hereafter."

Let us then look through all — to Jesus! Let us amidst all — to trust in Jesus! Let us notwithstanding all — to expect from Jesus! And in the darkest hour, in the dreariest season, endeavor to say, "I will wait for the Lord who hides Himself!" Yes, "it is the glory of God to conceal a thing," and Jesus, your Jesus, is God. O blessed assurance, of a blessed Savior — that though I do not understand what He is doing, nor why He does it — at present; yet I shall know hereafter! Let me be satisfied, more than satisfied with it — for I shall bless and praise Him forever and ever — for His mysterious, wise, and kind dealings with me!

04 Abiding in Christ

Abiding in Christ

"No one who abides in Him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin — has either seen Him or known Him." 1 John 3:6 The design of God in the gospel, is to make us like Himself — to conform us to His beloved Son, who is "the image of the invisible God." To this end — all the promises, privileges, and precepts of His Word are directed. At this, the work of the Holy and ever blessed Spirit aims. We must resemble Him — imperfectly here on earth. We will resemble Him — perfectly and completely, in Heaven. Christ-likeness is the object we should constantly keep in view — at this we should habitually aim. Being justified by grace, we should daily seek to be sanctified by the Holy Spirit; and that our bodies, souls, and spirits, should be preserved blameless, unto the coming of the day of God. This was John's object in writing this epistle, at this he aims directly or indirectly in every part of it. "These things write we unto you," he says, "so that you will not sin." And, "No one who abides in him keeps on sinning." Here is,

First, A DISTINGUISHING PRIVILEGE. To be in Christ. To abide in Christ. UNION to Christ, is the most glorious privilege of a child of God. It is vital and permanent. Faith brings us to the feet of Christ, love fixes on the beauty of Christ, and the Holy Spirit becomes the bond that unites us to His person. Being united to Christ, it becomes our imperative duty, as well as our high privilege — to ABIDE in Christ. This gives power to prayer, as Jesus says, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you — you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done for you." And this is the cause of fruitfulness. "He who abides in Me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit, for without me," or severed from me, "you can do nothing." No union — no power; no union — no fruit. To abide in Christ is to realize Him as PRESENT with us — and to act us under His eye. An ever-present Savior — is one of our greatest comforts. Realizing Him as present — we exercise faith in Him, He is the object of our confidence and trust. Realizing Him as present — we daily set our love upon Him, He is the object of our affection and delight. Realizing Him as present — we thus become zealous for Him, and diligent in His cause. Realizing Him as present — we live in fellowship with Him. This fellowship is an interchange of thought, feeling, and purpose; we drink into His Spirit, become of His mind, and naturally seek His honor. We come to Him — but it is to receive from Him; and out of His fullness we receive, grace upon grace.

We are to abide with Him — as our HEAD, who influences us; as the natural head does the body.

We are to abide with Him — as our HUSBAND, supplying us with all we need, and taking our cares upon Himself.

We are to abide with Him — as our FOUNDATION, sustaining us, and bearing the entire weight of our everlasting salvation.

We are to abide with Him — as the VINE, which renews its branches by sending up the sap which produces the buds, foliage, and fruit. We must believe in Jesus for influence, supplies, supports, and constant renewals. To abide in Christ — is having to do with Christ every day and all the day

— for all we need, desire, or hope for. As the wife abides with her husband, as the stone abides on the foundation, as the branch abides in the vine — so we must abide in Jesus. Thus piety becomes our element, spiritual things become natural, and carnal things lose their power over us. Here is,

Secondly, The RESULT of this privilege. "No one who abides in Him keeps on sinning." This does not mean that they are absolutely perfect, or entirely free from sin; otherwise every believer, would be a sinless person. But it means that abiding in Christ, they do not sin DELIBERATELY. They may be betrayed into sin. They may be overcome by temptation, as the best of men have been. But they cannot deliberately plan and execute that sin, which is prohibited by God's holy precepts.

They cannot sin HABITUALLY. Occasionally they may be overcome — but the habit of sin is broken. Every believer breaks off his sins, by righteousness.

They cannot sin FINALLY. Or having fallen, they cannot remain in that state. Grace within them will work and struggle, until it raises them out of such a condition.

He who abides in Christ, knows what sin is — in its nature, tendency, and deserts.

He knows that the nature of sin is contrary to God, turning the back upon Him, and trampling His law under foot. How can he do this while, he lives in intimate fellowship with Him?

He knows that the tendency of sin is to alienate him from God, hide his face, and expose him to His dreaded frown. How then can he indulge it?

He knows that every sin deserves Hell, and that every willful sinner deserves endless banishment from God.

Therefore he does not continue to sin. His heart is set against sin, and instead of indulging — he mortifies it; instead of yielding to the flesh — he crucifies it, with its passions and lusts. He thirsts for holiness, as the thirsty traveler for water! Holiness is the ruling desire of his soul. This is the great object of his pursuit. This is his chief delight. Often he sighs and cries out "Oh! to be holy, perfectly and perpetually holy!" Here is,

Thirdly, the proof of a CARNAL state. "No one who continues to sin has either seen Him or known Him." His creed may be sound. Evangelical sentiments may float in his brain, like snow flakes in the air. He may be able to split hairs in doctrine. But if he sins continually — deliberately, habitually, and finally — he has never known the Savior. A carnal state, is a state of ignorance. The carnal man is in darkness. Christ is not truly perceived or known. Such may be familiar with His name, and with all the leading facts of His Word — but they do not know Him. The man who lives in any known sin, has not discerned . . .

the glory of His person,

the nature of His work,

the tendency of His love, or

the design of His gospel.

He has no true faith! Faith is the eye of the soul; Christ is the object placed before it; and the gospel is the light by which Christ is seen. If the eye fix on Christ, the heart immediately desires a union to His person, and is willing to give up everything for this.

Faith sees that He came to put away sin, to destroy the works of the devil, and to make all those who believe on Him a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

Faith feels that the tendency of the love of Christ — is to holiness; and that it constrains all who feel it, to live not unto themselves — but unto Him who died for them and rose again. The soul that lives in sin, does not know the design of Christ's death — that it was to be the death of sin. The soul that lives in sin, does not know the nature of His love — which is the great principle of holiness. The soul that lives in sin, does not know the life of Jesus, as the pattern from which every believer is to copy — and the rule which every Christian is to obey. No sin is, or can be, sanctioned by the gospel! No sinner, who lives in, and enjoys sin, can be a Christian. Such are not united to Christ, they cannot be said to be abiding in Christ.

Union to Christ, is the source of evangelical holiness. No union to Jesus — no holiness of heart and life. And if there is no holiness of heart and life — there can be no union to Jesus. As well may the branch grow without union to the vine — as a Christian be holy without union to Jesus! And as well may a living branch be united to the vine, and never put forth leaves or fruit — as a person may be united to Jesus, and not bring forth the fruits of righteousness.

Indulgence in sin — proves a person to be ignorant of Christ. Head knowledge he may have — heart knowledge he cannot have. For just in proportion to our heartfelt, experimental knowledge of Christ — will be our hatred to sin, fear of sin, and careful departure from sin.

Union to Christ, if it is real and vital — will destroy the love and power of sin within us; and if we are not delivered from the bondage and service of sin — whatever may be our creed, profession, or confidence — we are still strangers to Christ, and separate from Him. For "No one who abides in Him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin — has either seen Him or known Him."

Living faith always . . .

perceives Christ,

receives Christ,

leads to union with Christ,

consecrates the heart to Christ, and

devotes the life to the service of Christ! This is the faith which distinguishes God's elect, to which the promise of salvation is made, and which invariably works by love.

05 God's Knowledge of Us

God's Knowledge of Us

"Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account!" Hebrews 4:13 "The Lord searches every heart and understands the intention of every thought!" 1 Chronicles 28:9 "I am the one who searches out the thoughts and intentions of every person!" Revelation 2:23 "O Lord, You know!" Jeremiah 15:15

God's perfect knowledge is like the pillar-cloud which led Israel out of Egypt, and through the wilderness: it is dark and a cause of terror to His enemies — but it is light and a source of comfort to His children. The thought often cheers us, "My God knows me!" Others may mistake me — He never will. Others may misunderstand me — He never can. He knows me intimately, thoroughly. His eye penetrates the depth of my nature, and looks under all the mysterious folds of my heart. There is not a thought in my heart, or a word in my tongue — but, "You know it completely, O Lord!" Let me meditate upon this fact, for a short time, in a devotional spirit, for my soul's profit, and the Lord's glory.

"O Lord, You know" my TRIALS. The quarters from which they come, their pressure upon my mind and heart, and the grace I need to bear them patiently, as a Christian ought. O Lord, You know my domestic trials, that they are great; my commercial trials, that they are heavy; my soul trials, which are worst of all. "You have tried me, and known me." My trials increase with my years, they come from new and unexpected quarters, they often bewilder my mind, and harass my soul — but, "O Lord, You know" them! They do not come unobserved by You. Rather, are they not sent by You, and intended to unsettle my mind from the things of time, and lead me to seek fellowship with the glorious things which are above? May every trial drive me to the feet of Jesus — that I may soothe my troubled spirit with a view of His beauty and glory.

"O Lord, You know" my TRIALS! In every trial, Lord, sympathize with me, give me special grace, and help me to endure temptation as a disciple of Jesus should.

"O Lord, You know" my FEARS. They are many, they are painful, they hang on so firmly. Many of them are unfounded, and often cause me much unnecessary pain. I am sometimes afraid of man. Occasionally afraid of God. Often, very often afraid of myself. My heart is so foul, my corruptions are so strong, my lusts are so active, Satan is so crafty, my temper is so irritable, and my tongue is so unguarded — that I am afraid that I shall some day fall and dishonor Your holy name!

Then, at times,

my mind is so dark, so carnal, so dead to everything that is holy;

my heart is so stupid, stubborn, and hard;

my affections are so earthly, depraved, and carnal

— that I am afraid that my past experience is delusion, my hope unfounded, and my profession a mistake. I am afraid I shall fall short at last — that death will undeceive me, and eternity be spent under the fearful frown of God! My fears are often so numerous, so powerful, and so natural, that I am as timid as a dove; and sit down and write sad and bitter things against myself.

"O Lord, You know" my FEARS, the cause of them, the nature of them, and the effect of them — and You alone can effectually deliver me from them.

"O Lord, You know" my FOES. They are deceptive, dogged, and determined. They watch me, worry me, and weary me. They lay wait for me. They praise — and try to deceive me. They flatter — and try to puff me up. They threaten — and try to intimidate me. The old roaring lion — seeks to destroy me. The old serpent — endeavors to beguile me with his subtlety.

O the enemies I find in my heart! At times I meet with them in the church. Occasionally I come in contact with them in the world. My enemies are numerous, and they are powerful — but, "O Lord, You know" them all. They can only act under Your eye! You are present in their secret councils, You know their private plots, You watch their craftiest movements.

O what a comfort it is — when I can believe that God is my Father, and realize that He has all my enemies under His eye, and that He holds them all in check.

"O Lord, You know" my FOES! Lord, let me not dishonor You by fearing man, or trembling before Satan, or feeling alarmed at death! Rather give me wisdom and grace, to put on the whole of the armor which You have provided, and manfully resist, oppose, and overcome them!

"O Lord, You know" my DESIRES. And these sometimes, form my only evidence of a work of grace in my heart. You know that I do desire to be holy — though I am not. You know that I desire to worship You in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. You know that I would exalt Jesus, spread His fame, and bring thousands of sinners to His feet. You know that I desire to mortify the flesh, with its affections and lusts; to put on the new man; to walk in holiness; and to be a burning and shining light. You know that I desire to be, to do, and to suffer all Your will without complaining, or even wishing for the least alteration in a single point. But my desires — and my conduct, my inward desires — and my outward behavior, are often sadly at variance, for I find the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other, so that I cannot do the things that I would. But blessed be God, my desires for practical conformity to His will are natural, habitual, and often powerful; and must, as I believe, spring from the presence, power, and operation of His Holy Spirit.

"O Lord, You know" my DESIRES! Give me grace that I may be enabled to carry out my desires in all the walks of life!

"O Lord, You know" my HOPES.

Hopes that refer to time — and hopes that run into eternity.

Hopes that respect the body — and hopes that refer to the soul.

Hopes for the church — and hopes for the world.

Hopes for my family — and hopes for myself.

Especially my hope of eternal life — and of sharing in the glories and triumphs of Jesus when He comes. The crown of my hope, You know is, the soon coming of my beloved Lord. To see Him come in the clouds, with glory, and all the holy angels with Him. To shine in the glory of the first resurrection, to be invited to sit down at the marriage-supper of the Lamb, and to share in the privileges and immunities of the New Jerusalem. O that the King of kings would come! O that the Lord would descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet call of God! O that the Lord's people could lay aside their prejudices, and as one man embrace the doctrine, and hasten the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"O Lord, You know" that my hope of acceptance in Your sight, rests on the finished work of Jesus alone, and all my hopes of good in this world, or in that which is to come — are founded on Your most blessed and holy Word.

"O Lord, You know" my SINS and FOLLIES. No one else does. No one else ever will. How could I look anyone in the face — if I thought he knew what was passing in my heart, or what is transacted in the chambers of my imagination within! The Lord alone can search the heart. He only knows the worst of us; and He only knows the best; for the best and the worst, are both concealed in the same heart. The eye of God sees every motive, every thought, every lust, every action! His eye is on that mysterious portion of our nature, called the imagination, on which such strange pictures are often painted, in which such fearful scenes are sometimes transacted. What a depth of pollution there is within us! What billows of corruption sometimes roll and swell! What streams of moral filthiness sometimes flow from the heart into the imagination! How difficult sometimes to keep it back. "You know my folly, O God; my guilt is not hidden from You!" Psalms 69:5

Little does the young Christian think what the pure and holy eye of God sees within him; and what his own eye will one day discover, filling him with alarm — if not with horror, with shame and self-loathing before God. Then he will enter into poor Job's confession, "Behold, I am vile!" and into Isaiah's exclamation, "Woe is me! I am undone!" "What more can I say unto You? For You know Your servant, O Sovereign Lord!" 2 Samuel 7:20 But blessed be God, the righteousness of Jesus covers all, conceals all; and the grace and Spirit of God will ultimately purge away the whole foul heap from us!

Now our iniquities are forgiven, and our sins are covered; but then our natures will be perfectly purified, and be white as the falling snow! "Beloved, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as he is!" 1 John 3:2

"O Lord, You know" my FRAME. You know what it was — when I lay dead in trespasses and sins! You know what it is — in my present transitory state. You know the diseases and disorders, from which the body suffers. You know the imperfect organization and depraved principles, by which the soul is fettered, troubled, and hindered. You know the weakness of the memory, the smallness of the mental capacity, the trembling state of the nerves, and the weak condition of the muscles. Yes, my Father knows it all!

"He knows our frame, He remembers that we are dust." The entire whole of us — is perfectly known to our Heavenly Father! He can fully understand us. He can sympathize with us. He can make all things work together for our good. All that in us is good — He has produced by His own

Spirit and Word. All that is evil, He has permitted in His wisdom and holiness.

He knew us from eternity. When He chose us to eternal life — He knew all about us. When He called us by His sovereign and distinguishing grace — He was well aware of what we were, and what we would be. God has never been disappointed in us, whoever else may be.

O to know Him! To know Him fully, to know Him experimentally, to know Him so as to love Him with all our powers, to serve Him every moment of our lives, and to seek to promote His glory in every action we perform. O to know Him as revealed in Jesus, as seated on a throne of grace, as working all things after the counsel of His own will! O to know Him in His own glorious world, where all His perfections are fully displayed, all His attributes are manifested, and all His gracious relations are enjoyed. O for the time, when we shall know Him — even as also we are known by Him!

"O Lord, You have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; You perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; You are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue — You know it completely, O Lord. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. Where can I go from Your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence? If I go up to the Heavens — You are there; if I make my bed in the depths — You are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there Your hand will guide me, Your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, 'Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,' even the darkness will not be dark to You; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to You!"

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Psalms 139:1-24

06 A Serious Inquiry

A Serious Inquiry "Lord, what is man— that you should notice us, mere mortals that you should care for us?" Psalms 144:3

"Lord, what is man!" Thus the psalmist exclaimed, when reviewing the Lord's goodness to him, and recounting the gracious characters in which the Lord stood to him. Great trials had brought him great mercies. Great difficulties had given him a great experience of the Lord's goodness. He rejoices in God as his strength and instructor, the source of his mercy, his fortress, his high tower and his deliverer, his shield and the object of his trust. God had been to him — all that his circumstances required, so that notwithstanding his many fears and numerous foes — he had persevered and prevailed. Looking back upon the past — he felt constrained to look up, and looking up he was led to contrast God's goodness to him — with his own insignificance and unworthiness, and almost involuntarily cried out, "Lord, what is man!"

It is the language of surprise! He was struck with wonder and amazement at the conduct of his God, and full of admiration, he gives vent to his overpowering feelings in this brief exclamation.

It is the language of humility! He felt crushed under a sense of God's amazing kindness to one so sinful, to one so vile; the sense of God's undeserved grace laid him very low; and from the dust of self-abasement, he expressed his wonder at the Divine dealings with him.

It is the language of gratitude! His heart was full, it was overflowing with grateful praise. Surprised, humble, and grateful — he was prepared to glorify his good and gracious God. And this will be the case with us, when we take a retrospect of the past from the right point; when we look at ourselves — and then at our God; at our righteous deserts — and His merciful dealings. We will now briefly look at the question with a view to our own edification.

What is man PHYSICALLY? He is fearfully and wonderfully made. He is the chief of the works of God. What a wonderful structure is the body! What wisdom is displayed in devising, arranging, and adapting the different parts — to form the one simple, yet complicated machine! The bones, the muscles, the blood-vessels, the nerves, the brain, the flesh, the skin; the different organs of sight, hearing, smelling, tasting, and feeling. What a beautiful and yet suitable dwelling they form for the immortal soul.

Yet when we think of what man is, and then of what man was — how great the contrast. When we look at man in youth, in health, and in full vigor — and then at what man is when aged, or diseased, or dead; we cannot but feel ready to exclaim, "What is man!" But when we direct our thoughts to God — to His greatness, glory, holiness, and immutability — we feel a still stronger impulse inducing us to cry, "What is man?" Man so little, so sinful, so sickly, so changeable, so transitory! "What is man — that you should magnify him? and that you should set your heart upon him? That you should visit him every morning, and try him every moment?"

What is man MORALLY? This is the worst part of the picture! It is bad enough to see man diseased, suffering, dying, moldering to dust; but when we come to inquire into the cause of all this — it is fearful indeed!

Man is dreadfully depraved. He has fallen from the state in which his good and glorious Creator placed him. He is now totally depraved. He is God's enemy. His heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. His carnal mind is enmity against God. He is full of evil principles and evil passions. He has become, not only unprofitable — but abominable! No part of God's creation presents such a hideous sight to His pure and holy eyes — as man does, for in him heart and mind are alike depraved, and set in opposition to Himself.

Man is wicked — but he is not only wicked, he is weak. Sin has become a fearful disease within him. He has no will to do good. He has no power to do good — if he had the will. Hence the apostle when partially renewed, speaking of himself, said, "To will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good, I find not."

Man is perverse, he closes his eyes, his ears, and his heart against God! It is only for God to require something — and man determines not to do it; or for God to prohibit something — and man immediately desires it. His will is as much opposed to God as it can be. He slights His mercy, dares His justice, and defies His power. He perseveres in sin, unless the Lord by His invincible grace prevents him. He has sunk lower than the beasts which perish, hence the Lord complains, "The ox know his owner, and the donkey his master's crib — but Israel does not know, My people do not consider!"

There is everything in man to offend the eyes of God's holiness, and to grieve His loving heart. Looking at man as fallen, polluted, and under the power of sin — we may well ask, "What is man, that You are mindful of him?" Psalms 8:4

What is man SPIRITUALLY? That is, man as renewed by the Holy Spirit, as united to Jesus, and as brought into fellowship with God. Man as a new creation. Man as in Christ. Ah! what is man then? The change is astonishing! The alteration is striking! It is like turning from a barren wilderness — to Eden, from an arid desert — to the garden of the Lord.

Renewed man is God's own CHILD. The child of His love. The child which He has adopted for His own. The child into which He has infused His own holy nature. The child on whom He confers His richest blessings, which He elevates to the highest honors. The child whom He constitutes His heir, and a joint-heir with His only-begotten Son. The child to which He gives His Spirit, for which He prepares a city, and appoints a kingdom.

Man is God's CHOICE. When angels sinned — He cast them out of Heaven, bound them in chains of darkness, and doomed them to appear before His Son for judgment. There was no mercy for them. Not one of all their vast number was chosen. They were left to reap the due desert of their deeds. Not so man. God saw that he would fall. He knew what he would become — and yet He chose out of fallen mankind, a number which no man can number to eternal life. "Lord, what is man, that You should choose him?" The only reply we can give is, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight."

Man is chosen in Christ — chosen to holiness — chosen to everlasting life — chosen to the highest honors, and the sweetest joys. How wonderful is God's grace — and His ways are past finding out. What an overwhelming thought for a sinner to cherish in his bosom, "I am God's choice! God has chosen me to salvation! God has chosen me of His own mere grace! God has chosen me, who deserved and must have sunk to Hell — if left to myself! God has chosen me to be His child, the object of His love, and to share in all the glories of His Heavenly kingdom!

Man is God's COMPANION. He is to walk with God. He is called to have fellowship with God, He is directed to pour out his heart before God. He is to treat God with confidence, communicating everything to Him, asking everything of Him, and expecting every good thing from Him. God promises to visit him, to manifest Himself to him, and to dwell in him and walk in him. What astonishing grace! And will God, the great, the glorious, the holy God — take poor, sinful, vile, wretched man for His choice, His child, His companion? He will. He has done it. He is daily doing it. Even this moment He is saying to every believer, "Let me hear your voice, let me see your countenance; for sweet is your voice, and your countenance is lovely."

What will renewed man BE? This is a question which no man can answer, for even the inspired Apostle John confesses his ignorance, "Beloved," says he, "now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be — but when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is!" "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined — what God has prepared for those who love Him!"

Renewed man will be like Jesus. Man will be with God. Man will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of his Heavenly Father. Man will see and hear and know, and possess, and enjoy — all he can possibly desire, all that his glorified nature is capable of. He will be more than unfallen Adam was, more than angels are, for he will be as nearly like God as perfected human nature can be made like the Divine.

Let us then meditate devoutly upon this glorious subject, let us endeavor to realize our interest in it, and let us pray the Holy Spirit to unfold and apply it to our souls — until filled with surprise, humility, and profound gratitude we exclaim with David, "Lord, what is man, that You take knowledge of him! Man is like to vanity, his days are as a shadow that passes away."

07 Christ's Estimate of His Church

Christ's Estimate of His Church "You are absolutely beautiful, My love; there is no spot in you!" Song of Solomon 4:7 This book represents the love of the Man Christ Jesus, to his people, his admiration of them, and communion with them. Every spiritual person more or less understands it; but it requires deep spirituality, much intimacy with Jesus, and some knowledge of the manners and customs of the East, fully to enter into it. It is a most precious part of God's inspired Word. In the Old Testament, it is like Paradise among the gardens, or the tree of life among the trees of that garden. May the Holy Spirit lead us into it, and favor us with the rich enjoyment of the fellowship represented by it. The OBJECT of Christ's love, is His Church.

All that were given to Him by His Father.

All that are redeemed by His most precious blood.

All that are quickened and sanctified by His Holy Spirit.

Such He calls "My love." He compares them to a lovely and delicate woman. In His view — she is incomparably beautiful; but in her own eyes — she is black, unsightly as the tents of Kedar. She sees so much of her own inward depravity, and feels so much of the working of the law of sin in the members — that she often loathes herself, and lying low at His feet, exclaims, "Behold, I am vile!" In her conduct, she is represented as at times unstable and unkind; refusing to rise from the pillow of ease to admit her Beloved, though He was saturated with the dews, and called to her, saying, "Open to me, my love!" She was drowsy and cold, so that He had to call to her, invite her, and exhort her to rise up and accompany Him to enjoy the pleasures He had provided for her.

She was as timid as the dove, without heart or courage; which led Him to say, "My dove, who is in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me hear your voice, let me see your countenance; for sweet is your voice, and your countenance is lovely."

She was too pleased, intimate, and affected with the company of others; in consequence of which, he calls to her, saying, "You who dwell in the gardens with friends in attendance, let ME hear your voice!"

How exactly like us — so unstable, so unkind to Jesus, so dull and drowsy, so timid and fearful, so much taken up with the things of time. Yet her love to Him was sincere — and so is ours. We do love Him — though not so ardently as we wish. We are sincere — and we can often say, "You know all things — You know that I love You!" Even at the lowest, we can say, "You know that I desire to love You."

Yes, Jesus has our hearts; if we love anyone — we love Him. If we desire union with anyone — it is with Him. If we enjoy the company of anyone — it is His company. We have loved Him ever since He was made known to us by His Holy Spirit, and we love Him still. There have been interruptions in the exercise of our love — but it is still embedded in our hearts. We can find no substitute for Jesus, nor do we desire to find any. He is all our salvation, and all our desire. If we

could love Him as we wish — our souls would be all on flame, and always on flame, with love to Him! The ESTIMATE Jesus has of His Church is, that she is absolutely beautiful, and without spot. "You are absolutely beautiful, my love." He views her now as she will be by-and-bye. She will be absolutely beautiful and faultless; as it is written, "Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the Word, and to present her to Himself as a glorious church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish — but holy and blameless!"

He looked upon her with a lover's eyes — which overlooked all her defects, and fixed only on her excellencies. He admired the work of His own SPIRIT in her. That work is a holy work; a beautiful work; a work of the highest excellence. It produces love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, and faith — all of which are lovely in the eyes of Jesus.

"There is no spot in you." His perfect righteousness covers her — and hides every spot! Looking upon herself, she exclaims, "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags!" Very unfit to be the bride of Him who is the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of His person. But, looking upon herself in Jesus, she says, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation; He has covered me with the robe of righteousness; as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels!"

Precious Savior! You not only worked out this magnificent garment — but You put it upon our souls with your own hands! He has clothed me; He has covered me. Yes! Jesus makes us lovely — and then calls us so. His own graces adorn His beloved, His blood-bought bride, until, as it is said by the prophet, "Your renown went forth for your beauty; for it was perfect through My loveliness which I put upon you, says the Lord God." Her perfect image was before Him — when He thus commended her, "You are absolutely beautiful, My love; there is no spot in you!" He saw the purpose of His Father fulfilled; the end of His work accomplished; as it is written, "For those God foreknew — He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son. And those He predestined — He also called; those He called — He also justified; those He justified — He also glorified!" The TITLE by which Jesus calls His Church is, "My love." This expresses His choice of us, for He has chosen us to be His, from all around us. This expresses His preference of us, for He prefers His people to all the universe besides. This expresses His strong attachment to us, for His love is as strong as death, and stronger too. This expresses His high esteem of us, for He esteems His people even above angels. He saw the angels fall — and He did not take their nature to redeem them. But when His people fell — He assumed their nature, took their place, became their Substitute, died in their stead, went into Heaven to plead their cause, and will soon come again to receive them to Himself! Well may He exclaim, "You have not chosen Me — but I have chosen you." "I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn you." O wondrous love! O more wondrous Lover!

Believer, Christ's views of you — are not like your own. He speaks of you in very different language — from what you would speak of yourself. He says, you are "absolutely beautiful; there is no spot in you;" and what He calls you — He will make you! He calls things that are not, as though they were — to express the certainty of their being so; because He is determined and engaged to make them so.

We shall soon be all that Christ says that we are! All His purposes towards us — are love. All His thoughts of us — are thoughts of love. If Christ thinks thus of us — never mind what others think; His thoughts are right — theirs are wrong; His are wise — theirs are foolish; His shall be realized — theirs disappointed. Christ often commends — when man condemns. His apostles, the first believers, and the holy martyrs, were condemned by man, and considered unfit to live! But Jesus commended, sustained, and will reward them. As Christ speaks to us on earth, so He speaks of us to His Father in Heaven. There He pleads our cause — because He loves us; there He will carry our cause — for He has wisdom, weight, and worth enough to do it. He opens His heart, expresses His desire, utters His will; saying, "Father, I will that those whom You have given Me, shall be with Me where I am — that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world." Blessed be Jesus for His love, His love to us; for the revelation of His love in the Word; especially by His Spirit in the heart!

Let us therefore close our meditation in the language of Jude, "Now unto Him who is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy; to the only wise God our Savior — be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever! Amen."

08 A Testimony

A Testimony "The Lord is good — unto those who wait for Him; to the soul who seeks Him!" Lamentations 3:25 The testimony of a well-tried man is always valuable, as a tried testimony; and if ever man was deeply and peculiarly tried, it was Jeremiah. His strong affections procured him strong afflictions; and his circumstances were such as few have ever been placed in. War, bloodshed, captivity, destruction, and desolation — all around him! Hated, misrepresented, imprisoned, tempted, and filled with pain and sorrow himself! While God seemed to leave him in the hands of men, and hide Himself from him. It was in such trials, that he learned the value of the truth; and in them, and after them, that he bore this testimony to the goodness of his God: "The Lord is good — unto those who wait for Him; to the soul who seeks Him!" To whom is this promise made? "To the soul who seeks Him." The Scriptures are full of encouragement to seeking souls, for seeking is one of the characteristics of the Lord's own people.

They all seek to know Him, and so to know Him as to put their trust in Him.

They seek to receive from Him all needed blessings; the blessings of providence, and the blessings of grace.

They seek to commune with Him as with a father and a friend.

They seek to ascertain His will — and obtain grace to obey it.

They seek to realize a saving interest in His love, the enjoyment of His favor, and the fulfillment of His precious Word.

They seek Him in His own way — by earnest, fervent, persevering prayer.

Above and before everything else — they seek Him until they find Him.

"To those who wait for Him." The Lord will appear — but it shall be in His own time. The Lord will work for us — but it shall be in His own way. Abraham had to wait more than twenty years for Isaac; Jacob had to serve Laban as long; and Joseph had years of sorrow and imprisonment, until the iron entered into his soul. But none of them waited in vain; none were they ashamed of their waiting. Hope deferred, may make the heart sick; but when the desire comes — it is a tree of life.

Now, many of the Lord's people have to wait long for Him; and all have to wait more or less. He who inhabits eternity need not hurry; nor will He be hurried by His creatures; no, not even by His own people. His purposes are formed,

His plans are drawn,

His times are fixed — and

He does exactly according to His will. His people have to wait for Him — to work for them; they need that wrought in them, and done for them — which none but God can do. They apply to Him,

plead with Him, expect from Him — but have to wait for Him. His people have to wait for Him — to confer needed blessings upon them. He keeps His blessings in His own possession. He dispenses them with His own hand. He teaches His people their need of them, produces a desire for them, leads them to His throne to ask for them, and enhances their value by keeping them waiting for them. His people have to wait for Him — to reveal Himself to them; the Most High God, like the sun, can only be seen in His own light. His people want to enjoy His manifestations, and to rejoice in His presence as a sin-pardoning God and gracious Father. For this they long, sigh, groan, and pray. The privilege is certain — but they must wait the Lord's time for the enjoyment of it. His people have to wait for Him to confirm His Word to them. They read it, believe it, plead for it, hope for its fulfillment — but are kept waiting for its accomplishment. They wait with ardent desire, earnest longings, hearty prayers; in the way of His precepts, and in the observance of His ordinances. In waiting, they are blessed, and the end of their waiting — is the realization of the blessing waited for.

Hence, The testimony. "The Lord is good unto those who wait for Him; to the soul who seeks Him." This testimony was experimental — Jeremiah could say, "I have proved it." It was inspired — for he spoke as he was moved by the Holy Spirit. Its proof was, that God had testified His approbation of such; had, in all ages, sanctioned them; and had never failed, in the end, to satisfy them. Long did Jacob wait for the salvation of the Lord; but he died an old man, and satisfied. Its OBJECT of waiting is to encourage faith, prayer, and patience; that we should believe — when we cannot see; pray on — when the Lord does not answer; and patiently wait — when everything seems to be against us. Another object is, to fortify us against doubt, fear, and temptation. It is so natural to doubt God's veracity and faithfulness — that we often fall into it before we are aware of it. It is so common to fear that God will not do as He has said — that we need constantly to be cautioned against it, and urged to resist it. We are all tempted to indulge hard thoughts of God, and to draw rash conclusions from His delays — that it is needful to fortify us against it. This testimony of the tried prophet is intended for this purpose.

Another object is, to do honor to God's veracity, faithfulness, and benevolence. It is just saying, God is true — whatever you may feel, think, or say!

God is faithful — however you may fear, fret, and conclude!

God is good — however you may be tempted, tried, and harassed! Your feelings, your circumstances, your rash conclusions — do not in the least affect God's character! He is good — after all that you have thought, said, or suffered. So good, that He is doing you the greatest possible good — by the very means which leads you to doubt whether He is good to you at all."

Seeking soul, God is condescending, beneficent, true to His Word, and He will bless you indeed. Your seeking Him — is a proof of His goodness to you, and is introductory of His bestowing blessings upon you. Your seeking Him — is not from chance, but from a Divine purpose; it is not from your nature — but from His grace; it is not the result of circumstances — but from the teachings of His Holy Spirit. You may not be aware of it, and it may be difficult to convince you at present that it is so; but you will both see and confess it by-and-bye. God will glorify His goodness and His grace in the experience of every seeking soul — and therefore in your soul, though at present you may think yourself the vilest of His creatures, and be writing the bitterest things

against yourself. Your desires were kindled by His grace, are kept alive by His power, and will only expire in the full enjoyment of His glorious presence!

Dear friend, is it so — that the Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him? Then let us seek Him daily, nor be satisfied without a sense of His presence, a taste of His love, and the witness of His Spirit. Let us wait for Him continually — wait for Him until He appears to us, works for us, and bestows every needed blessing upon us! If we wait believing in His Word, hoping in His mercy, and looking out to see His hand — He will be sure to bless us. As it is written, "Whoever is wise — will observe these things," (His glorious works in providence and grace,) "even he shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord."

Let us wait patiently. Let us not wonder — if He does not appear exactly at our time. Patience befits us — as poor, dependent, sinful creatures. Patience is required of us — as pensioners upon His bounty, suppliants at His throne, and expectants of His blessing.

Let us believe the testimony confidently: it is true; it has been well tried; it has stood the test. Yes, "the Lord is good, ready to forgive, plenteous in mercy unto all who call upon Him." He has been good to us, he is good to us now, and He will be good to us in all the future. His past goodness — should inspire us with confidence and courage, and fortify us against all our natural fears and Satan's temptations. O for grace to say, in reference to every trial, trouble, and need, "I will trust and not be afraid, for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song, He also has become my salvation!" "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and He knows those who put their trust in Him." "The goodness of God endures forever!"

09 Redemption from the Curse

Redemption from the Curse "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." Galatians 3:13 As creatures we are all under law. The formalities of the law may vary — but its essential principles are the same. The law commands us. It tells us what God requires of us. It demands that we be holy, just, and good. That we love God supremely, and others as ourselves. It threatens disobedience. It condemns the sinner. Its condemnation is called a curse. It dooms us to punishment. To be punished with separation from God, and to endure torment in proportion to the nature, number, and magnitude of our crimes. We are condemned, because we have violated the law. It was given to our first parent, as our representative. It was impressed on his nature, and notwithstanding our depravity, there is a partial copy of it in our nature still. If conscience accuses us, it is because it recognizes a rule, it perceives that we have violated it, and it accuses and brings us in guilty accordingly. The Jews had the law in a peculiar form. The moral law was united with the ceremonial law. There was the standard of moral rectitude — but there was also a typical representation of how sin may be pardoned, and the sinner be saved. But the Scripture has concluded that both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin: under its power, and under condemnation for it. The law pronounces a curse upon us all, because we have all sinned. The curse which the law pronounces is just — and therefore must be executed. If it is executed upon us, we are ruined forever.

Here then is our dilemma. We have sinned, the law curses and condemns us, its curse and condemnation are righteous — and if executed upon us, we are undone forever. How then can we escape eternal punishment? The text gives the answer. Let us attend to it with faith and gratitude.

"Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." To redeem is to deliver. To deliver righteously, by the payment of a price — or meeting the demand in order to emancipate. In our case, the curse must be executed. The penalty must be paid. We could never pay it ourselves — but the righteous Lawgiver and Governor was willing to accept of a substitute, to allow someone to suffer in our stead. But whoever undertakes for us, must be able to endure what would be inflicted, and so act as to deserve our liberation. There must not only be suffering — but meritorious suffering.

Here was the difficulty: Who has love enough to undertake to suffer for us? Who if he undertakes to suffer — could thereby merit our release? The answer to these questions — is JESUS. Our dear and adorable Lord Jesus, had love enough to move Him to become our substitute, and as our substitute — He could effect our everlasting deliverance. He therefore, who was divine — took our nature and became human. He who was in Heaven — came and tabernacled upon earth. He not only took our nature — but our place. Becoming our substitute, He took our responsibilities upon Himself. He engaged to do all that the law demanded; and He engaged to suffer all that the law required. He met the demands of the law perfectly, and He suffered the penalty of the law fully. He was made a curse for us. The sentence was transferred from us — to Him. He was condemned in our stead. He died for our offences. By dying — He merited our release. His blood was our

ransom-price. He came to give His life a ransom for many — and He gave it.

It was written in the law, "Cursed is every one who hangs on a tree." Jesus was hanged on a tree on Golgotha, and thus it was publicly proclaimed to all, that He was accursed. In himself He was the blessed God, and the source of blessing to all creation — but He became a curse, in order to become our Redeemer. Taking our nature — He became our kinsman, being our kinsman according to the law He had a right to redeem His kindred; having a right to redeem — He made use of it, and paid the price of our everlasting freedom. Blessed be His great, gracious, and glorious name forever!

What wonderful love the Savior must have possessed — to stoop so low, to suffer so much, to undertake such a work! What wonderful love must have filled the bosom of the Father — to give His Son for this purpose. To accept of His substitution. To allow the transfer of our guilt — to Him. To appoint Him to suffer as our Redeemer. Let us admire and adore the infinite, unparalleled love of our good and gracious God. But are WE redeemed from the curse of the law? Was Jesus made a curse for US? These are solemn questions, and they ought to be settled. What says the Scriptures? for these must be our guide. "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." Am I a sinner? Do I deeply and habitually feel it? Am I humbled on account of it? Do I ardently and honestly desire to be saved from the power and consequences of sin? If so, "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes on Him should not perish — but have everlasting life." Do I believe on the Son of God? Do I so believe, as to commit my soul into His hands to be saved by Him? Do I so believe, as to trust in His blood alone for my pardon, as to rely on His finished work alone for my redemption? Do I so believe, as to resign myself to Him, to be used by Him for His glory, and be employed in His service to His praise?

If so, there is no doubt but Jesus has redeemed me from the curse of the law; and if He has redeemed me, I shall never be accursed of God, or suffer the punishment due to my transgressions. The law having been fulfilled by my substitute, justice being satisfied with the obedience and death of my Redeemer — I shall never be condemned; but shall be acquitted at God's bar, and be pronounced justified for His sake. This is the gospel, the good news of redemption by the blood of Jesus. The glad tidings of deliverance from all curse and condemnation by simple faith in the Lord Jesus.

"All who believe are justified from all things." If Jesus has redeemed us, by being made a curse for us — we need not fear that we shall ever be accursed. Need not! We ought not. It is dishonorable to Him, and reflects upon the justice of our Heavenly Father. "There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus."

We should not trifle with so glorious a subject, with such a solemn theme; but we should receive it with all seriousness, and believe it with all confidence.

We must not continue in sin. Faith in the death of Jesus, is the death of sin! No one can believe that Christ was made a curse for him, in order to redeem him from the curse of the law — and yet habitually indulge in sin! It is impossible. If our faith does not set us against sin, and inspire us with a love to holiness — it is not the faith of the operation of God, the faith that distinguishes God's elect. The faith that receives freedom from Christ, employs that freedom for Christ.

If Christ has suffered for us — we ought to be willing to suffer for Him; if He obeyed for us — we ought to obey Him; if He was accursed for us — we ought to be ready to be reproached, condemned, or accursed for Him. May the Lord, the Holy Spirit, give us grace that we may prove to all around us, that Jesus has given himself for us, to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify us unto himself, a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

Reader, if you have no sincere faith in Jesus, you are still under the curse. You have no proof or evidence that Jesus died to redeem you, and if Jesus is not your Redeemer — you will be eternally undone. If Jesus was not made a curse for you — you will be accursed to all eternity. No one can deliver us from the curse of the law, but Jesus; and He only delivers those who believe on His name, rely on His blood, and walk by the precepts of His Word.

10 RENEWAL

RENEWAL

"But I have pleaded in prayer for you, Simon, that your faith should not fail. So when you have repented and turned to me again, strengthen your brothers." Luke 22:32 The interest which Jesus takes in his people, is intense. Here it is manifest that his eye, his heart, and his voice — were engaged for Peter; though He knew how basely Peter would deny Him. Satan was plotting against the Apostles, he desired to have them to sift them as wheat — but the eye of Jesus watched the fiend, read the very thoughts of his heart, and determined to frustrate him. His eye affected his heart, and He deeply sympathized with his disciples, especially with Peter, whose weakness and folly He knew. His voice was heard before the Father's throne, that Peter's faith might not fail.

What a mercy for us that the eye of Jesus watches all our enemies; his ear listens to all their purposes, plans, and designs; his heart beats with unutterable love and tender compassion for us, and He intercedes for us before his Father and our Father, his God and our God. He knew Peter would be recovered, and therefore He directs him what to do after he was restored. He was to turn his shameful fall to account, and to sympathize more deeply with his brethren, watch over them more tenderly, and tend them more wisely. "When you are converted, strengthen your brethren." Here see:

First, what we NEED: to be renewed — that is, turned back to Christ. We can only be regenerated once; we may be renewed (turned back to Christ) often. The life communicated at the new birth is immortal and divine; it never dies; conversion is the effect of that life, and the evidence of its power. Conversion is a turning to God. We hear his voice, we feel his power, and we turn from self — to Jesus, from law — to gospel, from sin — to holiness, from the world — to the church. But we often BACKSLIDE, wander, and grow cold; then we need afresh, the putting forth of the Divine power within us, to bring us back to God.

Surely the church needs to be renewed to Christ now. May the Lord confer this blessing upon us. A turning back to Christ, will produce deeper convictions:

Deeper convictions of the sinfulness of our natures, the inconsistency of our lives, and our inexcusableness before God.

Deeper convictions of our danger by nature — as exposed to the just wrath of a sin-hating God, and of our danger now of falling into sin, folly, and mistakes.

Deeper convictions of the value of the soul — which must live while God lives, and either exist in endless torment — or unspeakable joy.

Deeper convictions of the value of the cross of Jesus. That cross on which our sins were atoned for, where our peace was made, and by which our old man is crucified. Precious cross, of a more precious Savior! But for the cross — there would be . . .

no light in our mind,

no peace in our consciences,

no joy in our spirits,

no love in our hearts,

no hope in our souls! No one prizes the cross of Jesus — like the re-converted soul. A turning back to Christ — will produce sweeter enjoyments. We shall have sweeter enjoyment of peace with God; that peace which passes all understanding, and which is a foretaste of the rest that remains for the people of God. We shall more sweetly enjoy love to God, which will be rekindled and strengthened by the amazing love which brings us back from our wanderings, and nearer to our Father's bosom. We shall sweetly enjoy zeal for God, for we shall be all alive in His work, full of zeal for his glory, and anxious to extend his cause. A turning back to Christ will produce great zeal. We shall be ready to do anything which God requires, or to go anywhere if God bids. Then we shall be ready to say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening!" "Command, Lord, and your servant will obey." A turning back to Christ will produce greater power in prayer. There will no longer be dull, lifeless, dronish prayers; but, with heart, energy, and determination, we shall go to God for blessings — like the man for the three loaves, taking no denial; we shall plead the promises, like the poor widow to the unjust judge, with the mind made up to prevail. Oh, for powerful prayer in God's church! A turning back to Christ will produce greater pleasure in praise. We shall bless the Lord with all the heart, praise Him according to his excellent greatness, according to his unparalleled goodness. Praise will rise up naturally from the gratitude of the heart, flow forth in songs before the throne of God, which will be most pleasing to Him. A turning back to Christ will produce greater enjoyment of the Word. We shall read it with new eyes, hear it with new ears, and feed upon it with new appetites. Its promises will sparkle before the eyes, its doctrines will be music in the ears, and its very precepts will be sweet as honey to the soul. A turning back to Christ will produce greater attention to ordinances. We shall no longer deify them, or put them in the place of Christ; nor degrade them by trampling them under our feet. But we shall see their value, feel their importance, and enter into their design. The prayer-meeting, the weekly service, the Lord's supper — will be precious to us, and no trifle will be allowed to keep us from them.

Lord, renew your people! Renew my soul! Being re-converted, we see —

Secondly, what we should DO, when once we are renewed — strengthen our brethren. We have brethren who are weak in faith. Most families have one or more weaklings in them — the Lord's family has many. These weaklings are apt to be overlooked, especially by those who are comparatively carnal, cold, and worldly. Oh, how many members of our churches neglect that command, "We that are strong — ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves." But the renewed soul will pity, compassionate, and strengthen the weak in faith. Many are feeble in hope. They do not grasp the promises with a firm hand. They do not rest steadily on Jesus. They are not looking at unseen things, and for the coming of our beloved Lord; and, therefore they have more fear, than hope. These are weak, and need strengthening.

Some faint in the long and difficult way. The road is so rough. Their cross is so heavy. Their strength is so small. Their unbelief is so active. Satan is so busy. Professors are so careless in dealing with them, that they become weary and faint in their minds. They need cordials, and need

them administered often. Oh, how many in the present day droop under their duties, and decline, being sick! These need to be led to the great Physician — to be watched over, cared for, and strengthened. But one evidence that we need to be renewed is, "All seek their own, not the things that are Jesus Christ's." Whereas the command is, "Let no man seek his own — but every man another's welfare." Oh, for grace to look out for the weak, from love to Jesus; and to be daily endeavoring to strengthen them, for Jesus' sake!

We should strengthen them by testimony. Bearing our personal, experimental, heart-felt testimony — to the greatness, freeness, and power of God's love, as made known to our souls by the teachings of the Holy Spirit.

Telling them of his wondrous faithfulness, which never falters, never fails; but remains like the sun, which is "a faithful witness in Heaven;" like the rock, which defies the tempest and the storm.

Speaking of his divine power, which, like the shepherd's arms, gathers the lambs to lay them in his bosom, or is stretched out to repulse and drive back the foe; or like a powerful garrison, which preserves the city from the invading enemy; that mighty power by which we are preserved through faith unto complete salvation.

Testifying to them of Jesus. Of the manner in which He . . .

receives sinners;

communicates blessings to them;

restores them as wandering sheep to his fold;

employs them again, though runaway servants;

and makes them happy in his own precious love.

How much there is in Jesus — to strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees! It is by setting Jesus before our weak and feeble brethren — that we shall be able to strengthen them as our Lord directs. To testimony we should add prayer. Prayer with them, and prayer for them. To prayer, we should add example — a holy, loving, lamb-like example. Preaching Christ to them by what we do — as much as by what we say. But some may read these lines who have never been converted at all. My friend, your case is sad, for Jesus says, "Unless you are converted, you shall never enter into the kingdom of Heaven." Peter speaks to such as you when he says, "Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord." May God give you the grace to turn to Him without delay!

Some may read them who were converted, and were lively, happy, and active in God's ways; but now they are backslidden — cold, worldly, and unspiritual. Does such a one's eye now rest upon this page? My dear friend, let me beseech you to hear God speak. He places Himself before you. He seems to put Himself at your bar. He says in the most pathetic language, "Oh, my people, what have I done to you? How have I wearied you? Testify Against Me!" What has He done — that will justify your conduct? What charge can you bring against Him? Hear Him again: "Have I been a wilderness unto Israel, a land of drought?" Why do you neglect the closet, the Bible, the sanctuary, the work which God has set you to do? But some happy, renewed soul may read them. My

brother, my sister, I rejoice with you. God has shown you great mercy. Jesus has manifested wonderful love. Realize and exercise your thoughts upon the greatness of the mercy manifested — then you will perceive that your obligations are greatly increased, and feel it to be your imperative duty to do as Jesus commanded Peter, "Strengthen your brethren."

Beloved, the great thing we need is power; the power of the Holy Spirit, to bring us back from all our wanderings — to the feet of Jesus; to fill us with zeal for his glory; to consecrate us afresh to his service; and make us useful and happy in his ways. As it is, we sow much — and reap little; we work hard — and witness few results; we employ many means — to comparatively little purpose. How many sermons are preached — and not one soul converted! How many churches decline — rather than increase and grow! What skeletons of Christians many of us are! Truly, many of us resemble the seven lean cows of Pharaoh — we eat up all, and are none the better for it! May God in his infinite mercy pour out his Spirit, renew us one by one, until we all become full "of goodness, able also to admonish one another."

11 The Spirit of Faith

The Spirit of Faith "We having the same spirit of faith." 2 Corinthians 4:13

Whether this passage refers primarily to the believing spirit of the Apostles, or to the Holy Spirit as the author of faith — is of small consequence to us now.

Faith is the gift of God. It distinguishes God's elect. It is of the work of God. As a gift — we receive it gratuitously from God. As a work — it is wrought in us by the Spirit of God. As an act — we put it forth as the effect of the grace of God. Faith is divine in its origin, nature, and end. Without the Spirit — there is no faith. Without faith — there is no receiving Christ. Without receiving Christ — there is no salvation. We are therefore under the greatest obligation to the Holy Spirit, and ought to acknowledge our obligation, and speak well of His name. The Holy Spirit produces faith in us. He quickens us — and we feel our lost and miserable condition. He enlightens us — and we see the exact adaptation of the Lord Jesus Christ to us. He is just what we need. He is everything we need. A desire springs up in our heart to possess Him. We look. We long. We feel as if we would give a world — if Christ was ours. But doubt, fear, and suspicion works. We cannot exercise confidence in Him. We cannot cast our souls upon Him. We are afraid to trust for eternal life only to Him. Sometimes we question our warrant to do so. Sometimes we feel as if we would at once venture on Him. But there is no faith which brings the knowledge and enjoyment of salvation — but by the direct putting forth of the power of the Holy Spirit. He unveils Christ before us, opens His loving heart, exhibits the efficacy of His precious blood, shines upon some portion of His holy Word — and confidence springs up. We see that we are welcome to Jesus. We feel that we can venture our everlasting all into His hands. We cast ourselves at His feet, confess our sin, grieve over our unbelief, appeal to His mercy, trust our all into His hands — and we are at peace. We believe the love that God has to us. We trust in the finished work of Christ alone for acceptance with God. We renounce our own works. We put self out of the question. Jesus is our Savior. His glorious work is our salvation. He is everything to us. We have entrusted everything to Him. He is to answer for us at the bar of justice. He is to deliver us from Satan, sin, and Hell. He is to confer upon us everything we need. He is to work all our works in us. In a word, He is a complete Savior to us. We crown Him Lord of all, and desire to honor and glorify Him, in our bodies, souls, and spirits. Faith is produced.

Here is the Holy Spirit's work. The author is concealed, for we are not conscious at the time, that any power but our own is employed, all appears so natural. And the Spirit does not speak of Himself — but reveals Christ, testifies of Christ, leads to Christ, exalts Christ before us, and teaches us to place the crown of crowns on His head. The Holy Spirit sustains our faith. It needs to be frequently renewed, refreshed, and revived; for it will droop, and fade, and become weak like a plant, unless it has air, sun, and dew. The renewings of the Holy Spirit revive and strengthen faith, so that it battles . . .

with unbelief — and conquers;

with the world — and overcomes;

with Satan — and makes him flee.

Faith in itself, is a poor, weak, timid thing; at least, such our faith often seems to be. But when backed, sustained, and strengthened by the Holy Spirit, there are few things that it cannot do.

Faith is an inward conviction of the existence of invisible realities, and a confident expectation of promised blessings. Thus it supports the mind, animates the spirit, pleads with God, urges us forward, and makes us more than conquerors through Him who loved us! The Holy Spirit directs our faith. Sometimes we turn from the Gospel to the LAW. It may be unconsciously — but as sure as we do, we get straitened in our minds, bewildered in our judgments, troubled in our consciences, and hardened in our hearts! We look upon God . . .

as a Lawgiver — rather than as a Father;

as exacting — rather than giving;

as angry — rather than love.

Now are we troubled. Coldness, barrenness, and bondage are experienced by us.

Sometimes we look too much into OURSELVES. We pore over our corruptions, dwell upon the hidden evils of the heart, and are taken up with our own unworthiness! Then we begin to droop, despond, and give way to legal fears. We find no liberty in prayer. We have no heart for praise. We dare not appropriate the promises. The spirit of a child is lost, and the spirit of bondage returns. We are bewildered. We are like one lost in a labyrinth. We cannot retrace our steps, or return unto our rest. Like a lost sheep — we continue to roam, wander, and bleat.

Now the Holy Spirit, very graciously comes to take off the yoke of the LAW, to turn away the eye from OURSELVES, and direct our faith to JESUS afresh. Now He appears to us as the Law-fulfiller, as made of God unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. We behold Him as a perfect Savior, having done all for us, gratuitously, before we knew Him. This meets our case. Our bonds are broken. The prison-door is opened. We come forth to the gospel light. We feed in His holy ways. We joy in the Lord, and rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.

Faith in Jesus brings us the assurance of pardon, the sense of acceptance, the enjoyment of peace. Blessed be the Divine Comforter, for directing our faith to Jesus anew. The Holy Spirit excites our faith. It often becomes dull and inactive. Unless actively employed at the throne of grace, and steadily taken up with the Lord Jesus — faith is sure to become weak and inactive. Like the plant in winter, there is life in the root — but no verdure or beauty on the boughs. Like animals which hibernate, there is life in the heart — but no energy or active power in the limbs. We cannot, at such times, exercise faith in prayer, or expect a loving answer from God's throne. We cannot exercise faith in God's providence, or believe that the dark clouds will bring fruitful showers; and the frosts of winter will bring the beauties and blessings of spring. The promise meets the eye — but brings no relief to the heart. The doctrines of grace appear clear and lovely — but like the winter's night they are cold and powerless. With us, everything is — as our faith is. And our faith is often feeble, dull, and inactive. The Holy Spirit condescends to watch over the grace He has implanted, to keep His eye on the work He has wrought; and in His own time, and by the means

He is pleased to select, He comes and stirs up and excites our faith anew.

Just now we were like the moulting eagle, crouching down, shivering, and cleaving to the dust — but now our youth is renewed, we mount upward, we catch the warm rays of the Sun of Righteousness, we are strong, lively, and happy. We clasp the promise — and press it to the heart. We embrace the Savior anew — and bless His adorable name. We enter into the Holiest afresh, and hold sweet, heart-melting, soul-ravishing fellowship with God. Sweet, unutterably sweet, is the excitement produced by these renewing visits of the Divine Monitor. The Holy Spirit perfects our faith. Having produced it as an act of sovereign grace — He sustains, directs, excites, and carries it on unto perfection. He feeds it with knowledge, guides it by wisdom, and strengthens it with power — so that the righteous holds on his way, and he who has clean hands, waxes stronger and stronger. The faith that first led us to the cross for pardon — often leads us to the fountain for cleansing! The faith that first brought us to Christ — will never allow us to go on long, or far, without Christ. The faith that brought us to the door of the sheep-fold — will bring us to the gates of glory! Faith will work in us — and we shall work, war, and walk under its influence, until we receive the end of our faith, even the complete salvation of our souls.

Faith is the root of every Christian grace. Faith is the life of our religion — and the Holy Spirit is the life of our faith. Let us therefore honor Him, as the worker of faith in us. And while we look principally to Jesus as the object of faith, the store-house of every blessing, the Alpha and Omega of the gospel; let us not forget, fail to realize, or cease to acknowledge — the goodness and grace of the Holy Spirit of God, who is to us "the Spirit of faith."

Spirit Jehovah, we worship You, and beseech You to strengthen that faith which You have wrought in us! You have given us a little faith — give us more. Make us like Abraham — strong in faith, giving glory to God. And if the eye of an unbeliever rests upon this page, let it please You through it, to produce faith in his heart, that he may flee to Jesus, embrace the cross, find peace, and obtain everlasting life, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

12 Yet They Are Your People

Yet They Are Your People

"Yet they are Your people, Your inheritance, whom You brought out by Your great power and Your outstretched arm." Deuteronomy 9:29 The imperfections of the Lord's people, are sometimes so numerous and so great — that it is difficult for them to recognize the likeness of Jesus in them. They are so worldly, so selfish, and indulge such unlovely tempers — that we are ready to say that they can never be the Lord's redeemed people. But it is impossible for us to say, with how much imperfection — true grace may dwell. Who would have thought that Jonah was a true prophet, one of God's own choice, an object of His infinite and endless love? But he was!

Who, that heard Peter curse and swear that he never knew Jesus, would have said, that he had love in his heart to Him? Yet so it was!

It is well for us, that God sees not as man sees; for man judges by the outward appearance — but the Lord judges by the heart. A sour temper — sometimes conceals the sweet grace of Jesus. A rough exterior — may hide a gentle loving heart. But the Lord's people are, they always have been — very imperfect. Moses admits this; but he closes by concluding after all, "Yet they are Your people, Your inheritance, whom You brought out by Your great power and Your outstretched arm." We will notice,

First, the Lord's conduct towards Israel. There is the stamp of His own nature, the impress of His own divinity, upon it. It is the conduct of a God, who is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy and truth. In Egypt, when smarting under a tyrant's rod — He looked upon them, He pitied them, He appeared for them, and exerted Himself on their behalf. Long did He bear with them, and was determined to deliver them. He treated and showed Himself to them — as God. He brought out His people from under Egyptian slavery — though haughty Pharaoh resisted, though the people complained, and though timid Moses was afraid. Having brought them out — He constituted them His own peculiar people, called them His children, treated them as such, and claimed them as His own inheritance!

Just so, has He acted towards us: we were in bondage under the elementary principles of the world, we were led captive by the devil at his will, we were serving divers lusts and pleasures, hateful and hating one another. He looked upon us, He pitied us, He determined to save us. He sent us His Word — His servants — His Spirit — and His grace. He crushed the power of our foe, He subdued the enmity of our hearts — and He brought us out of darkness into His marvelous light, translating us into the kingdom of His dear Son.

He constituted us His people — by the work of His Spirit; He made us His children — by adoption and grace, and claims us for His own inheritance.

We are His people — and He is our God;

we are His sheep — and He is our shepherd;

we are His children — and He is our Heavenly Father. In acting towards us thus, He . . . displays His sovereignty, manifests His grace, exalts His gratuitous mercy, confounds our foes, lays us under the deepest obligation, and will secure to Himself everlasting glory!

Let us now consider, Secondly, Israel's conduct toward God. What a contrast is here!

Look at them at Marah — murmuring against Moses and against God, saying, "What shall we drink?"

See them in the wilderness of Sin, murmuring and exclaiming, "If only the Lord had killed us back in Egypt! There we sat around pots filled with meat and ate all the bread we wanted. But now you have brought us into this wilderness to starve us all to death!"

See them Mount Horeb, where they make the golden calf, and worship it.

View them at Taberah, where they wailed, "If only we had meat to eat! We were better off in Egypt!"

See them at Massah, where they cried, "Why have You have brought us up out of Egypt — to kill us and our children, and our cattle with thirst?"

Look at them at Kibroth-Hattaavah, where they provoked the Lord to wrath.

See them at Kadesh-Barnea, where they indulged in unbelief, and were excluded from the land. Their conduct from first to last was ungrateful, for God was their firm, fast, and faithful Friend.

It was unnatural — for He was their kind, tender, and indulgent Father.

It was treasonable — for He was their just, merciful and gracious Sovereign.

It was fearful — for it was against a present God, the symbol of whose presence was constantly before their eyes.

Well might Moses say of them, "You have been a stiff-necked people since the day I knew you!"

Well might God say of them, "I know how stubborn and obstinate you are. Your necks are as unbending as iron. Your heads are as hard as bronze. I know so well what traitors you are. You have been rebels from birth!"

What a fearful picture, what a catalogue of crimes! Still Moses says, "Yet they are Your people, Your inheritance!" Oh, wondrous grace! Can these be the Lord's people? Yes, of them it is written, "The Lord has chosen Jacob for Himself, and Israel for His peculiar treasure." Surely it could not be for their excellency; or on account of their good works! No, "for My own sake," says the Lord, "for My names sake." God had a reason — but it was hidden in His own heart; He has a cause for

acting — but it is found in Himself — not in His people. But as base as their conduct was — who of us can cast a stone at them? Who has not done the same, really — if not formally? Have we not . .

murmured against His providence,

complained of His dealings,

idolized His gifts,

lusted after forbidden objects,

and disbelieved His Word? Which of Israel's sins is it, of which we cannot find the counterpart in our own hearts or conduct? Have we not been ungrateful — as ungrateful as they were? Have we not been unnatural in our conduct toward God — as unnatural as they were? Has not our conduct been treasonable — as treasonable as theirs was? Is not our sin fearful — more fearful than theirs, as it is committed in clearer light, against greater love, after deeper obligations?

Friend, however you may feel — the writer feels that he is truly guilty.

Whatever excuse you may have — he feels that he has none.

However you may extenuate your crimes — he cannot extenuate his.

Conscience seems at this moment, to whisper, the language once addressed to Job, "Is not your wickedness great, and your iniquities infinite?" Yes! I am vile! I loathe myself! I abhor myself! I desire forever to glorify God's most, free, sovereign, and distinguishing grace — which alone saves me from Hell! But let us glance,

Thirdly, at the plea of Moses. The Lord was angry and threatened to destroy them. Moses falls down before Him, to plead with Him. He admits every charge that was brought against them — but still pleads, "Yet they are Your people, Your inheritance, whom You brought out by Your great power and Your outstretched arm."

"Notwithstanding that they are base, unworthy, and guilty — yet they are Yours! They have been, they are rebellious — yet still, after all, as bad as they are — yet you have chosen them, wrought for them, acknowledged them, pledged yourself to them, and are engaged to deliver them!"

Just so, in reference to us, and the Lord's imperfect people with whom we are connected: they have naughty tempers, depraved hearts, inconsistent ways, and a host of infirmities, and imperfections — and yet they are the Lord's people.

He has chosen them — when perhaps none but the Lord would, knowing all about them, and the very worst of them.

He has wrought for them, and wrought in them, and does work by them — to our wonder and surprise.

He has acknowledged them at His throne, in His house, and by His providence — when none but a God would. His Word is pledged to them, and He is engaged finally and eternally to deliver them.

Yes, poor, timid, tried reader; as bad as your heart is, as imperfect as your life is, as numerous as your faults are — yet you have not gone beyond Israel, nor beyond many of the Lord's people around you. Do not write bitter things against yourself. Do not try to blot your name out of the book of life. Do not lie not against your right. You may be one of the Lord's people — notwithstanding all you have done, all that you feel, and all that you fear; and if you really hate sin, rest on Jesus, and sigh and seek for holiness — you are one of them, too.

Observe: Grace, free grace — is the source of all our blessings. But for grace — we would have been left wretched, and miserable, and poor, and naked! Through free grace — we have a saving interest in Jesus, and in all new covenant blessings.

Poor are the returns which the Lord receives from us. What have we rendered to Him — for all His wondrous benefits to us? What are we now rendering? What has been the state of our hearts towards Him? How have we treated Him in the closet, in the family, in the house of prayer? He has spoken — and have we listened? He has wrought — and have we observed? He has commanded — and have we obeyed? He has prohibited — and have we avoided? He has exhorted — and have we attended? He has invited — and have we accepted? Have we? But amidst all, our filial relationship still remains with God — and may be pleaded. He is our God — and we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture. He still . . .

speaks to us in His Word,

watches over us by His providence,

listens to us on His throne, and

promises to be very gracious at the voice of our cry.

God's grace — is wondrous grace. His mercy — is from everlasting to everlasting! Amidst all our changes — He never changes; and therefore we are not consumed.

13 PERPLEXITY

PERPLEXITY "What shall I say?" Isaiah 38:15

Such an exclamation escaped from the lips of Joshua, and it was the language of bitter disappointment, "O Lord, what shall I say, now that Israel has been routed by its enemies?" Joshua 7:8. The same words were uttered by our adorable Lord when His soul was overwhelmed with grief, in the prospect of His agonies and bloody sweat, His cross and sacrificial death: "Now is My soul troubled; and what shall I say?" John 12:27. Here it is the language of one who was filled with perplexity by the dispensations of Divine Providence. His soul was oppressed, his spirit mourned, and he compared his prayers to the chattering of a crane or a swallow.

Beloved, such is the case with us sometimes; our circumstances are so painful, so different from what we anticipated, that in bewilderment we exclaim, "What shall I say?"

First, we must say that God's dealings are very mysterious. His ways are not as our ways, nor His thoughts as our thoughts. His way is in the sea, and His path in the mighty waters, and His footsteps are not known. We looked for light — but behold darkness. We expected success — but we meet with failure. We anticipated prosperity — but we are plunged in adversity. Our purposes are broken off. Our plans are frustrated. Our skies are clothed with clouds. We are forced to say, "Truly, You are a God who hides Yourself!"

"What shall I say?"

Secondly, we must say that the words of Jesus are still true: "Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows." He foresaw it. He appointed it. He foretold it. But we were very hesitant to believe it. However it may be with others — we did hope that it would be different with us. Or, we hope that past trials would suffice, and that we should be exempted in future. But, no, almost every day brings some new trial, some fresh trouble, some unexpected cross! O Savior, Your words are indeed true! It is "through much tribulation that we must enter into the kingdom of God."

"What shall I say?"

Thirdly, we must say that some of God's promises require strong faith to believe them. He has assured us that He will rejoice over us to do us good; that He will hear our prayers, and listen to our cries; that all things shall work together for our good. But where are the answers to our prayers now? How can these losses, crosses, difficulties, dangers, and disappointments — do us good? Where is His love, His zeal for my welfare, His tender mercy now? Is He still the same? Is He yet in one mind? Must I believe that this is the very best thing that could happen to me? Yes, His promises and His covenant relations require it. But, oh, how difficult! What strong faith it requires; and mine, oh, how weak!

"What shall I say?"

Fourthly, we must say that God will do just as He pleases with His own children. He has the right, and He will exercise it. He will cross our wills, hedge up our paths, cut off our expectations, and give us wormwood and gall to drink. And why? Because He loves to pain us — or takes pleasure in our sighs and sorrows? No! Oh, no! But because He consults our welfare. Because He is wiser than we are. Why am I poor — and my brother rich? Why am I sick — and my sister healthy? Why are my efforts crossed — and my neighbor's crowned with success? Our Father refuses to answer such questions. He asks, "May I not do as I will with My own?" He kindly quiets us by the assurance, "You don't understand now what I am doing — but someday you will." Well did the patriarch exclaim, "He gives no account of any of His matters." Our Father wisely appoints the circumstances and lot of every one of His children. He has mapped out the path in which they are to travel. He has appointed their bounds, which they cannot pass. Then with Job we say, "He is in one mind, and who can oppose him? He does whatever he pleases. He will certainly accomplish what He has decreed for me, and He has many more things like these in mind." This is often deeply trying; but "what shall I say?"

"What shall I say?"

Fifthly, we must say that the trial of faith is often very severe, exceedingly painful. Gold is the finest of metals, and is tried more than any other; but the trial of our faith is much more severe, thorough, and precious than gold. Never did the Holy Spirit work faith in a sinner's heart — but the providence of God tried it. And when it is passing through the fire to be separated from all carnal, sensual dross — how exceedingly small it sometimes appears! Yes, sometimes when we seek it, it cannot be found. The fire causes the dross to rise to the top, and all we can see is fear, doubt, unbelief, self-pity, complaining, perplexity, envy, fretfulness, vexation, and pride!

We look for our faith, which before the trial appeared so healthy and so strong — but where is it? Untried faith is uncertain faith at best. Providence prepares the furnace, lights the fire, lays on the fuel — and our poor faith must pass through the ordeal. How difficult to say sometimes, "Though He slays me, yet will I trust in Him!" How difficult to believe that this rough road is the right road, which leads to the celestial city. But tried faith will be found unto honor, and glory, and praise at the appearing of Jesus Christ. Still, while the smoke of the furnace obscures our prospects, and the flames curl around our souls, we are often led to cry out, "What shall I say?"

"What shall I say?"

Sixthly, we must say that patience and perseverance are required under our trials. We must not murmur, we must not complain — but patiently follow wherever the Lord leads, and quietly bear whatever the Lord lays on us. He will not lay on us more than we are able to bear; but with every temptation He will make a way for our escape, that we may be able to bear it. Patience must calm the spirit, quiet the heart, and close the mouth. Then shall we say with the Psalmist, "I was silent, I opened not my mouth, because You are the One who has done this!" Had it been man — it might have been wrong. Had it been chance — it might have been injurious. But it was You — and, therefore, it must be wise, holy, and kind.

We are required quietly to persevere, to go on, though the way is rugged, though the thorns pierce our feet, though we cannot see one step before us. We must walk by faith, not by sight, believing that we are safe — in the midst of danger; that we are right — though everything is perplexing; and

that all will end well. Still, though we try to exercise patience, and slowly press forward in the trying path, we shall be prompted at times to exclaim, "What shall I say?"

"What shall I say?"

Seventhly, we must say that when Satan hinders us, none but God can effectually help us; therefore, we must look to Him. Satan is our sworn foe, our fierce and watchful enemy. If he cannot drive us back, he will try to hinder us, and make our work and our way bitter to our souls. His opposition is no child's play. He is no feeble foe, or inexperienced opponent. He hindered Paul — and he has hindered us. He will always try to hinder us, either by lulling us asleep, attracting us from the right road, or blocking up our path with difficulties and temptations. With such a foe — so crafty, so cruel, so diligent, so determined — what can we do?

Do? Say with poor, tried and troubled Micah, "As for me, I look to the Lord for help. I wait confidently for God to save me, and my God will certainly hear me!"

O Satan, you are a cursed and cruel foe; but your day is coming, and soon shall I place my foot on your accursed head; and in the faith of this I can now say, "Do not gloat over me, my enemies! For though I fall, I will rise again. Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light." Still, Satanic influence, and Satanic hindrances, do often make us sigh out, "What shall I say?"

"What shall I say?"

Finally, we must say that however rough the road — the end will more than make up for its toils and trials, for the end shall be glorious. Yes, my soul, "there is an end, and your expectation shall not be cut off." "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart." I may now be in darkness — I may now be misrepresented — I may now foolishly question even God's faithfulness; but "I will commit my way unto the Lord; I will trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass; for He shall bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold His righteousness."

I will say then, that God is faithful, that His Word is true, that His promises are sure, that His ways are right, and that His perfections shall be glorified, by-and-bye — by His dealings with me now. I will say, I have an Advocate above, Jesus Christ the righteous One — I have a staff on which I can lean, a hope that will not make me ashamed, a faith that will not fail, and a prospect, notwithstanding all, of a priceless inheritance—an inheritance that is kept in Heaven for me, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay!

I will say, that I believe that I shall overcome, and be more than a conqueror over every foe — through Him which has loved me, and given Himself for me! Blessed be His holy name, for wisdom to guide, and grace to help me in all the past; I will now endeavor to confide in Him, and trust Him for all that is to come.

14 Direction For the Perplexed

Direction For the Perplexed

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him — and He shall direct your paths." Proverbs 3:5-6 In this book by King Solomon, God speaks to us as unto children, calling every believer, "My son." He presents truth in a proverbial form — that He may instruct the mind, affect the heart, and regulate the life — without burdening the memory. In the context, He is pointing out the road to honor, happiness, and safety — even the observance of His law, confidence in himself, and consulting Him at all times. He says, "Let your heart keep my commandments." Obey from the heart — the precepts I give. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart; and do not rely to your own understanding." Exercise strong confidence in God — but have no confidence in yourself. "In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."

Here is counsel given. This implies that God is always present with us, is willing to be consulted by us, and will surely attend to us. This implies that our way is likely to be difficult, dark, and perplexing; a way in which we have never traveled before, and in which we are likely to be misled. This implies that only way to be safe, to walk securely — is to seek Divine direction; and this God is willing to give — but He will have us ask it of Him. We are dependents — and we must realize our dependence. We are but children — and we must feel it, and act as under the impression of it. This is recognized in our text, "In all your ways acknowledge Him."

You have his Word — consult it; make it your counselor, your directory and your guide.

You have his promise — believe it; He says, "I will teach you and instruct you in the way which you shall go, I will guide you with my eye."

You have his throne of grace — flee to it, and plead with Him as a man pleads with his friend.

And, while you consult his Word, believe his promise, and pray for direction — watch his hand. Providence is God working; working to accomplish his purposes, to fulfill his promises, and answer the prayers of his people. In his Word — He speaks to us;

on his throne — He listens to us,

by his providence — He works for us, and those who keep their eye open will be sure to see his hand.

While you watch his hand — seek grace to submit to his will. He wills to do you good, the greatest good; and if his will crosses yours, depend upon it — it is just because it is most for your benefit.

Gratefully acknowledge his favors as you receive them. Remember that, as sinful creatures, being criminals and traitors — we have no "rights". Consequently, everything short of Hell — is a mercy, everything but eternal punishment — is a favor. How many favors you receive — and how few praises you render! How many mercies are given you — and how few acknowledgments you

make!

He who habitually consults God's holy Word, believes his faithful promises, pleads at his gracious throne for direction, watches his working hand, submits to his righteous will, and gratefully acknowledges his sovereign favors — will never be allowed to go far wrong, or to go wrong for long; for —

Here is a PROMISE made. "He shall direct your steps." Man cannot direct himself; hence, Jeremiah said, "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks, to direct his steps." And Solomon wrote, "Man's goings are of the Lord; how can a man then understand his own way?" Again, "A man's heart devises his way; but the Lord directs his steps." And God himself has added, "I am the Lord your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you by the way that you should go." "Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying: This is the way; walk in it." As man therefore cannot direct himself, he should seek direction from the Lord, who both can and will guide him right. Then would we prove the truth of David's testimony, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and he delights in his way." The Lord will preserve the prayerful soul — from going in wrong paths; He will shine upon the right path, and lead him step by step, as the kind parent leads his beloved child. When our ways please Him, and God directs our steps:

we have peace of mind, and comparative freedom from anxiety and fear;

we increase in our acquaintance with God, as our covenant God, Father, portion, and everlasting all;

our confidence in Him grows and strengthens;

we live above the world, aim at the things which are not seen, and enjoy eternal realities.

See, then, the propriety of the direction: you are a child — only a child. Folly is bound up in your heart, you are prone to go astray, liable to be misled. But God is your Father, and He wishes to be your Guide. Attend, then, to his direction; consult Him at every turn; never make a change — until you have sought his guidance, and waited a reasonable time for it.

He is willing, yes, desirous to guide you — but He will be acknowledged, consulted, and trusted; in so doing, you honor Him, and secure your own best interests.

Israel was reprov'd, because they "waited not for his counsel;" and many have followed their example — to their cost. We naturally think well of our own judgment, or the judgment of our friends — and consequently fail to acknowledge God in our ways. The consequence is, we wander into the wrong path, get into difficulties, darkness, dangers, and sins; then we have to stop, mourn, pray, and repent of our folly.

Let us therefore be jealous of our own judgment, place no confidence in a human guide, cease to judge by appearances, and in every future stage of our pilgrimage, in every future step of our journey — strive to carry out the direction in our text to the full: "In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths!"

15 A Solemn Thought

A Solemn Thought "Are not my days few?" Job 10:20

Thus the afflicted patriarch appealed to the Lord, when he sought a mitigation of his sufferings, and relief from his fears. 'Are not my days few? Then pity me, spare me, and send me relief!' Reader, let us take home the inquiry to ourselves. It may awaken some profitable thoughts, and excite some useful emotions. You may be living as if you thought that your days would be many. Living in sin and in folly, and neglecting your everlasting concerns. You may be rising early and sitting up late to amass wealth. You may be indulging in late hours in bed, or spending much of your time in carnal gratifications. You may be planning and scheming, and working and acting — as if you were to live here forever, or were at least sure of many years to come. Years! why we are not sure of months, weeks, days, hours, nay minutes! At the best — our days will be few!

If our days are but few — let us be careful to fill them up, having some useful and profitable employment for every hour. Let us employ them for the best of purposes, even to secure the salvation of our souls, and a great and glorious reward when the Lord Jesus shall come to reward every man according to his works.

Let there be time for prayer. For prayer in private. For prayer in the family. For prayer with the church of God. Let us never neglect meetings for prayer. They are of great importance, and properly attended to, must be profitable.

Let there be time for praise. How much cause we have to praise God. How many things we have to praise God for. Our life. Our health. Our food. Our clothing. Our homes. Our bibles. Our sanctuaries. Our civil and religious liberty. A good hope, if we are believers. But time would fail me to enumerate particulars. Surely we ought then to have time for praise. Set times for praise. Seasons set apart on purpose to praise God. Times to go alone — that we may praise our God for His innumerable mercies conferred upon us.

Let there be time for reading. Especially for reading God's Word. The soul needs to be fed. Truth is the food of the mind. As we always find time to feed our bodies — let us not starve our souls. Many can find time for three or four meals a day for the body — but they cannot find time seriously and slowly to read one chapter in the day to feed the soul.

Let there be time for meditation. By reading we take in spiritual sustenance; by meditation we digest it. Reading without meditation, does us but little good. We can meditate as we go to and from our employment, and very often when engaged in it. We need lose no time for it, nor injure anyone by it.

Let there be time to do good to others. One object that God has in view in continuing us in this world, is that we may be of use to those about us. There should be time to call on the sick. To visit the bereaved. To speak a kind word to the widow and the fatherless. To render financial assistance to those in need, according as God has prospered us. Many would have more — if they

gave away more. God would entrust us with more — if we had a heart to do good with it. Money is given us — to be divided between ourselves, our friends, our needy neighbors, and God's cause.

Let us try and do a little good every day. If we only dry one tear, soothe one sorrowful heart, comfort one troubled spirit — it is something, and something worth living for too.

If my days are few — then I shall not need much of this world's baubles. However much I may have — I can only enjoy a certain amount. However much I may have — I must soon leave it. Let me not, then, crave much of this world's good. A little with God's blessing — a little with a contented mind — a little with a heart to do good with it, is better than great riches without. Enjoyment and contentment do not consist in the quantity that we possess, or even its quality — but on the state of the heart. If the heart is right, a good measure of comfort is certain.

If my days are few — then it is comparatively of little consequence what men say of me, or think about me — if conscience and God approve. Men may asperse my character, misrepresent my conduct, and suppose me to be influenced by wrong motives; but if my days are few, if God approves of me — what will it matter in a few years what men have said about me? Happy is the man who when so treated can say, "My witness is in Heaven, and my record is on high."

If my days are few — then my trials will soon be over, my troubles will soon end, and my conflicts will soon cease. Let it, then, be my constant care to bear my trials patiently, to endure my troubles meekly, and to pass through my conflicts courageously.

If my days are few, then time will soon end with me, eternity will soon open upon me — and I shall soon know what Heaven — or Hell, is! How solemn! In a few days — I may be in Heaven! I may see the Lamb in the midst of the throne. I may be joining with the triumphing multitude in the presence of God. I may be absolutely certain that I am safe, and safe forever. I may be filled with all the fullness of God. But in a few days — I may be in Hell! In Hell? Yes, in Hell! In unquenchable fire! In everlasting burnings! In unutterable torments! The sport of devils. The companion of lost souls. Under the blighting, blasting, and withering curse of God. Hell! Who can tell what Hell is? Who can describe its tortures, its horrors, its terrific scenes? Are not my days few? Yes! Then I must soon be in Heaven — or Hell. My last day will soon be here. It was never so near as now. But am I ready for it? Should I rejoice if tomorrow were my last? If six o'clock tonight terminated my last day, and I knew it, would it make me feel happy? Or would it awaken fear? Or would it fill me with alarm?

Reader, your days are few. They may be very few, much fewer than you have calculated on. Suppose they should end! Suppose the decree had gone forth from the eternal throne, "Tomorrow you shall die!" and you were to be informed of it by some angelic messenger who heard it pronounced — how would you feel? How? What would you do? Do! I can scarcely tell what you would do. But I know what you ought to do, and to do now. That is, seek and make sure of an interest in the Lord Jesus Christ. To be washed in His precious blood, to be clothed in His glorious righteousness, and to be sanctified by His most Holy Spirit. Let me most affectionately beseech you not to pass another night without bowing the knee and surrendering the heart to God, that so when your few days are past, you may be eternally happy. Flee, flee to Jesus, and trust in His precious blood.

"Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom!" Psalms 90:12

16 The Savior's Requirements

The Savior's Requirements

"If any man will come after Me — he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." Luke 9:23

Every Christian professes to come after Christ. He forsakes all other guides, and renounces all other masters. He looks to Christ to save him, to rule him, to be his Master and Lord. He comes to Christ . . .

as lost — to be saved;

as naked — to be clothed;

as miserable — to be made happy;

as ignorant — to be instructed; and

as having nothing — that from Jesus he may receive all things.

He is a sinner; Jesus is the Savior. He saves, not only by what He did for him — but by working in him, and requiring of him. He requires a full surrender, the subjection of the entire person, the consecration of the whole life.

If He justifies us — He will rule us.

If He atones for our sins — He will have our services.

If He gives us grace — He will require obedience.

Lord, I will follow You! "Will you? Then, hear my requirements: If any man will come after Me — let him deny himself!"

"If any man will come after Me — let him deny his own WILL" — for it runs contrary to the will of God. The church is to be one body, ruled by one will, and that will the will of Christ. Every believer is to seek to know what the will of Christ is, on every subject; and having ascertained it, to prefer it, bow to it, and endeavor to carry it out. Whatever is opposed to the will of Christ — is sin. My own will, and my own way, are to be given up, and exchanged for the will and way of Jesus.

"If any man will come after Me — let him deny his own DESIRES." He desires fame, honor, ease, wealth. Let all these be denied, and let him desire to be, and to do — just what Jesus requires. If duty leads him into obscurity — let him be willing to go there; if it leads him into disgrace — let him be willing to suffer it; if it brings pain, privation, and suffering — let him willingly endure them; if it makes him poor, and keeps him poor — let him be willing to be of "the poor of this world," whom God has chosen.

It is not what I desire that is to rule me — but what Christ requires of me; His will as revealed in His Word — is to be my rule; and His Spirit and providence are to be my guide.

"If any man will come after Me — let him deny his love of PLEASURE." Carnal gratification is sure to be sinful either in its nature or effects, therefore it is not to be followed. Jesus pleased not Himself. Paul pleased not himself. They did not seek their own pleasure, or mere carnal or intellectual gratification — but constantly aimed at something higher and holier. Jesus ever kept the end of His mission in view: "I came not to do my own will — but the will of Him who sent me."

Paul was guided by the admonition he delivered to the churches: "You are not your own, you are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your bodies and spirits, which are God's." To obey Christ, and not to please or gratify ourselves — is our one business. "Those who are Christ's, have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." The flesh should be on the cross — not on the throne. But, alas, how many professors pamper the flesh, obey the flesh — and crucify the spirit! Here, the flesh lusts to follow the fashions of the world, in "gold, pearls, and costly array;" there, the flesh pursues a fine dwelling, expensive furniture, and high living! In lower circles, it is the intoxicating cup, the theater, etc.; and instead of its being crucified — the flesh is consulted, caressed, and indulged! God's money is squandered, God's time is wasted, and God's precepts are disregarded!

"Let a man deny himself," said the Savior. "Nay," say many professors, "there is no need for it. I can indulge my love of finery, I can gratify my natural appetite, I can walk according to the customs of the world — and yet go to Heaven at last!"

"Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims — abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul," said Peter. "Nay," say many, "I see no reason to act as if we were strangers, or to conduct ourselves as if we were pilgrims; we can do as the generality of people do — and all will be right at last." Self-denial is out of fashion; it is seldom preached by most, and quite as seldom practiced by others.

"Let him take up his cross and follow Me." The true Christian is condemned by the world, he is looked upon as a poor, contemptible, wretched slave, who deserves crucifixion — because he testifies against it, and bears witness that the works thereof are evil. He is to realize this, and instead of being ashamed of it, he is to take up the cross — the instrument of torture, disgrace, and death — and bear it after Jesus. Loving Jesus more than father, mother, brother, sister, ease, pleasure, wealth, fame, fashion, finery, delicious food, liberty, man's sanction, yes, than his own life also — he is to act for Christ, in obedience to Christ, through so acting is considered as degrading and disgraceful, as carrying a cross to the place of execution. This was the spirit that actuated the Apostles, the primitive Christians, the martyrs and the host of sufferers for Christ in the days of old.

"Let him follow Me," says Jesus. That is, "Let him imitate me. Do as I have done. Copy my example. Tread in my steps." Oh, brethren, how different it is with us! How unlike the self-denying Jesus, we are! How little do we feel or act as Paul did, who said, "I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize!" And, again, speaking of himself and fellow-believers, "We labor, that whether present or absent, we may be accepted of Him." A little self-denial practiced by the church in general, would soon pay all

our chapel-debts, fill our missionary-treasury, bring every poor saint out of the poor-houses, and supply the needs of the ministers of Christ and poor godly widows. There are ornaments enough worn by church members — to do all this and more! And what is spent in tobacco, perfumes, wines, and luxuries for the table — unnecessary for, if not injurious to, health — would supply all the needs of God's cause! But are there no cautions necessary in the practice of self-denial? Yes — but few, very few, need them now-a-days. Take the following.

We are not to injure our health. Health is a talent that is to be taken care of, and employed for Christ — and whatever would injure or destroy our health, is to be avoided.

Whatever would unfit us for devotion, is not required. Close, constant, and intimate fellowship with God is necessary to maintain spiritual life in its vigor, and should, therefore, be sought in the closet, in the sanctuary, in the family, and by lifting up the heart while engaged in our daily avocations; while everything that hinders us, or unfits us for it, should be as carefully avoided.

Whatever renders us unnecessarily singular before men is to be avoided. We are not to imitate the multitude who do evil; but we are not needlessly to disgust them. But neatness, plainness, and inexpensive habits, especially if what is thus saved is spent to make others comfortable, and to promote the cause of Christ — will never do so. No reasonable person will be disgusted with another for wearing an inexpensive garment, or living in a plainly-furnished dwelling — in order to relieve the fatherless, supply the widow, and spread the truth of God.

Whatever would nourish pride and self-righteousness, is also to be avoided. Some may be proud of plainness, others may make a righteousness of self-denial, and trust in it for acceptance before God; nothing can be more wrong. But just because some abuse it — we are not to neglect it, seeing the Lord Jesus imperatively commands it. We should trust in nothing but the perfect work of Jesus for our acceptance before God; we should glory in nothing but the cross of Christ: yet while we do so, we should never forget that He "gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

Self-denial should be practiced — out of love to Christ. The Christian should say, "I love Jesus, because He first loved me; and because I love Jesus, I will not indulge the flesh — but endeavor to put off the old man with his deeds, and put on the new man, that so I may appear to be a new creation, created in Christ Jesus unto good works."

Self-denial should be practiced — to please God. "Because I believe it will please God — I will abstain from this, I will avoid that, I will walk circumspectly, I will avoid the very appearance of evil, I will endeavor to perfect holiness, to purify myself, even as He is pure. I will not seek my own happiness, much less the gratification of my flesh, first or principally — but my object shall be to please God. A duty may be trying, or burdensome, or be by some considered disgraceful — but I will take up this cross, I will carry it, encouraged by the persuasion, that it will please God."

Self-denial should be practiced — to help God's cause. God does not need our help, He can do without it. But He honors us by asking for it, by using it, by crowning it with His blessing. His gospel was committed to the saints, that they may spread it over the face of the wide world, preserve it pure and unmixed, and defend it against every foe. It was to be copied and circulated. It was to be preached, regularly and universally. To do this, men, money, and influence would be necessary; and God requires us to furnish them. With a little self-denial — we may do it; but for lack of

self-denial, churches are in debt, missionaries are needed, and mission-funds are low. In writing about self-denial in this article — my flesh shrunk from it. I imagine the devil tried to dissuade me from it. Something within whispered, "Writing thus, you will condemn yourself." Well, so let it be; let me be condemned, if the Lord's people can be benefitted. I feel condemned, justly condemned. I deserve to be condemned. But will a sense of condemnation lead to humiliation, confession, and reformation? That is the point!

Reader, what do you say? Shall we carry the matter to a throne of grace, shall we humbly confess our sins, shall we seek grace to help us to practice self-denial in future? Oh, for that grace that will enable us, when tempted to indulge the flesh, neglect our duty, lose sight of Christ's honor — or seek to please ourselves instead of pleasing God — to stand like a rock, press on like the apostle, and exclaim with Nehemiah, "But because I feared God — I did not act that way." And let us never forget the solemn words, "If you live after the flesh — you shall die; but if you through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body — you shall live!" Romans 8:13.

17 The Spirit of Christ

The Spirit of Christ

"Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow." 1 Peter 1:10-11

The Spirit who was in the Prophets, inspiring them to make divine communications to man, is said to be the Spirit of Christ. The same Spirit was in the Apostles, and the writers of the New Testament. That Spirit is now in every believer. He came at different times, in different forms, for different purposes; but it was always the same Divine Agent, the same loving testifier of Christ. To Him we are indebted for all that we know of Christ, for all we that enjoy of Christ, and for all the resemblance we bear to Christ. One cannot but feel love to the Holy Spirit — for His love to Jesus, and the honor that He puts upon our beloved Lord. O Spirit of Jesus, come now and assist me to write a few profitable lines upon this subject, and then bless them to the hearts of Your dear people!

The Holy Spirit revealed Christ. Every promise of Christ, every prediction of Christ, every type of Christ, in the Holy Scriptures — was given by the Holy Spirit. Even in the very early ages of the church, He took of the things of Jesus and showed them to His people. The Spirit reveals Jesus still. No sinner ever saw His glory, grace, and beauty — but in the Holy Spirit's light. The first heart-affecting view of Jesus we ever had, and all the soul-ravishing manifestations of Him since — are from this blessed Spirit of Christ. Still had he been to us a stone of stumbling and rook of offence, or like a root out of the dry ground, without form or loveliness — had it not been for the Holy Spirit. He opened the blind eyes of our understanding, He presented the sweet portrait of Christ in the mirror of the gospel, He threw divine light between the eye and the object, He pointed out His varied beauties and excellencies — and so won our affections and ravished our hearts! Blessed Spirit, reveal Jesus to us yet more clearly, and let us often behold him as the chief among ten thousand, the altogether lovely One!

The Holy Spirit qualified Christ for His work. Hence it was predicted, "The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him — the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord — and he will delight in the fear of the Lord." Isaiah 11:2-3. Therefore, we read that in the synagogue of Nazareth, when the Book of the Prophet Isaiah was given Him to read, He unrolled it, and read, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor;" and then added, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." Thus, the human nature of our Lord and Savior was qualified for the work He came into the world to accomplish; and we read that "He was led by the Spirit," filled with the Spirit, and "through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God." The Holy Spirit was given to Christ. This seems to have been one of the stipulations in the everlasting covenant, that Jesus was to come, to teach, work, suffer, die, rise, and return to His Father, and then receive the Holy Spirit as a reward for His work. The Spirit, therefore, was conferred on Jesus, promised by Jesus, and at length conferred by Him on

His Apostles, and then upon His whole church. Jesus now possesses the Spirit in all His vast and glorious fullness; He sends the Spirit to quicken, call, and sanctify the purchase of His blood; to qualify, set apart, employ, and sanction, the instruments He uses for the accomplishment of His purposes. He is now the Spirit of Christ, acting as it were, under Jesus, for the fulfillment of the predictions and promises of the Word, and for carrying on the Divine government in the church and in the world. O Savior, send Your Holy Spirit into Your church, in all the fullness of His gifts and graces, to rouse her up, to put life into her, and to crown her efforts with success! O Jesus, send Your Holy Spirit into my heart, to purify, adorn, and fill it with holiness — that it may be a fit residence for the living God, and a means of blessing to all around me! The Holy Spirit glorifies Christ. This is His special work. Whatever He does in the world, whatever He confers on the church, whatever He produces in the heart, this is His object — to glorify Jesus. Low thoughts of Christ, unworthy views of Christ, or unworthy expressions concerning Christ, never come from the Holy Spirit, or meet with His sanction. But every bright view of His glory, every sweet discovery of His person, every act of adoration, every exercise of faith on His Word and work, every heart-felt consecration of ourselves to His service and praise — is from the Holy Spirit. Just in proportion as we are under the work, teachings, and influence of the Holy Spirit — will be our sweet views of Christ, confidence in Christ, love to Christ, zeal for Christ, and desire to exalt Him, extol Him, and set Him on high. The Spirit strips us, empties us, gives us vivid views of our own depravity, pollution, baseness, wretchedness, and misery, on purpose to glorify Christ! And, oh, how precious, how unspeakably precious, is Jesus to our souls, when under such views of ourselves He is revealed to us as our Savior, Brother, Friend! No language can convey our feelings, or express our desires for His glory and honor. The more we are under the Spirit's teachings — the more shall we see of the dignity, majesty, glory, perfection, excellency, and suitability of our dear Redeemer. In every instance where the Spirit of Christ is, He leads the soul to crown Him "Lord of all." The Holy Spirit endears Christ. Our love to Christ is just in proportion to our sense of our need of Him, our realization of a saving interest in Him, our feeling of obligation to Him, and our intimate fellowship and communion with Him. And these are just in proportion as we are under the power and teaching of the Holy Spirit. The faith which the Spirit produces — always embraces Christ. Christ in His glorious person, finished work, sufficient sacrifice, powerful intercession, glorious offices, and gracious characters. And to those who believe — He is precious. Precious, not only in their estimation — but in their experience. They feel Him to be precious. His very name is as ointment poured forth. In proportion as they get near to Him — they are happy. In proportion to their resemblance to Him — they are satisfied. When they come up out of the horrible pit, and feel themselves extricated from the miry clay, and view Jesus as their Deliverer, as having delivered them by suffering, bleeding, dying, and rising for them — how precious, how unutterably precious, He is to them! And when they have been walking in darkness, questioning their state, drooping, doubting, desponding, and almost despairing — and they again read their interest in Him, realize nearness to Him, and are assured of His love to them — how dear, inexpressibly dear, He is to them then! But this experience flows from the work of the most gracious and condescending Spirit of Christ. Without His renewings — there would be no revivings, restorations, or rejoicing in Jesus anew. Spirit of Christ, endear Jesus to me daily! I consent that the flesh shall be mortified, that the world shall be crucified unto me — if I may but feel and enjoy Jesus as precious to my heart!

Finally, the Holy Spirit conforms to Christ. This is the great end He has in view. The person of Christ is the model after which He works. We are to be like Him. We are predestined to be

conformed to the image of God's only-begotten Son. The gospel is the instrument by which He generally operates. In the gospel — Jesus is unveiled, and stands forth as the glory of God. There the glory of God may be viewed without injury. He takes away the veil from our hearts, and as Paul writes, so we experience: "We all, in an unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even "by the Spirit of the Lord."

Every real view of Christ is transforming. We see Him now — and are changed into His likeness. We shall soon see Him in His glorified state, and be perfectly conformed to Him. Hence John testifies, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does 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." Blessed Spirit, daily carry on Your sanctifying work in our hearts! To that end, fix the eyes of our minds daily and steadily on the Lord Jesus; may He be always before us; and may we become gradually more and more like Him! Oh, for conformity to Jesus! Oh, for this proof, above all others, that the Spirit of Christ dwells in us!

Reader, those are solemn, heart-affecting words of the apostle, "Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh — but in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him." What! not belonging to Jesus! No, unless we have Christ's Spirit — we are not His people.

Wherever the Spirit of Christ is, He . . .

reveals Christ to the understanding,

enthrones Christ in the affections,

gives Christ the control of the will,

endears Christ to the heart,

glorifies Christ in the soul, and

conforms the person to the lovely likeness of Christ.

What do you know of these things? Is the Spirit of Christ within you? Do you know Christ, love Him, live upon Him, walk in fellowship with Him, and obey Him? The Holy Spirit turns the eye from everything — to Jesus; and just in proportion as we are under His influence and teaching, shall we turn away our eyes from our works, our wealth, our blessings, and our corruptions — and fix them simply and steadily on Jesus.

Reader, there is no true religion without the Spirit of Christ, and we have not the Spirit of Christ unless we lie low in the dust before God, rest on the finished work of Christ for our acceptance with God, and desire and strive to be like Christ in this present evil world. The true standard of excellency — is the example of Christ; and we have just as much true religion — as we have likeness to Christ, and no more. Spirit of Jesus, descend on the reader's heart; fill the soul with Your presence and power; and make these lines the means of endearing Jesus to His people, and of bringing rebellious sinners to His feet.

18 Holiness Unto the Lord

Holiness Unto the Lord James Smith, 1865

"On that day even the harness bells of the horses will be inscribed with these words: 'Holiness unto the Lord.' And the cooking pots in the Temple of the Lord will be as sacred as the basins used beside the altar." Zechariah 14:20 This text refers to a time of general, if not universal, holiness; when the Lord's people will not only consecrate all they have unto the Lord — but will visibly mark it as His. They will not be ashamed, nor afraid to own, that not only themselves — but all they have, is the Lord's; consecrated to His service, to be used only for His honor and glory. Thus carrying out the apostle's admonition: "Whether therefore you eat, or drink, or whatever you do — do all to the glory of God." O that there were such a spirit in every one of us now!

Holiness is the beauty of the Divine nature; and in holiness more than in anything else, shall we resemble God, when mortality is swallowed up of life. In habit, holiness is the opposite of depravity; in act, it is the opposite of sin. It is inward and outward conformity to God's holy law, which is "holy, just, and good." It flows from God's eternal election as its source; for we were chosen in Christ Jesus, before the world began, that we might be holy. God determined to have a people, who would be pictures of His holiness, therefore He made choice of us, and set us apart to show forth His praise. We were chosen to salvation, as the end; through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth, as the means.

Holiness flows through redemption. Christ also loved us, and gave Himself for us, that He might sanctify and cleanse us. He gave Himself for us — that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

Holiness is produced by the Holy Spirit, whose office and work is to make us holy. The instrument He uses is the Word; as Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them through Your truth, Your Word is truth." The manner in which He effects it, is by showing us what sin is, leading us to fear it, obtain the pardon of it, setting the heart against it, and thus delivering us from its power, guilt, and consequences. "By the fear of the Lord, men depart from evil."

Holiness is manifested in a variety of ways. The blessed Spirit gives us to perceive its beauty — and then we admire it, seek it, and cannot rest until we obtain it. The possession of it is manifested by our rendering ourselves as living sacrifices to God, holy and acceptable, as a reasonable service. As the effect, we become the Lord's servants, voluntarily engaging to serve Him, in holiness and righteousness, all the days of our life. The result is, we become consecrated to God, we are the Lord's, all we have is the Lord's, all we have and are, is employed for the Lord.

We write on all we ARE, on all we HAVE — "Holy unto the Lord!" We no longer live unto ourselves — but unto Him who died for us, and rose again. We are to have . . .

holy thoughts,

holy desires,

holy motives,
holy aims,
holy pleasures,
holy sorrows, and
pursue holy objects.

Nothing appears so lovely, so desirable — as holiness! The great reason why we desire Heaven is, because it is a holy place, filled with holy people, engaged in the holy worship of a holy God!

See then, what we should BE — holy. This was God's end in our election, redemption, and effectual calling. This is God's design in all our trials, troubles, and exercises; they are for our profit — that "we may be partakers of His holiness."

See also what we should DO — write, "Holy unto the Lord!" on all we possess. We have no right to possess, use, or wear — that on which we cannot write, "Holy unto the Lord!"

Christian, is there anything in your house, in your business, or on your person, on which it would not be becoming to write, "Holy unto the Lord?" If so — ought you to possess it, practice it, or wear it? Would such an inscription look well on some of our costly furniture, fine clothing, or entertainments? Would it? Do not shun the question — but let conscience take it up, examine, and return an honest answer.

We should use all that we have — as consecrated to Jehovah's service and praise —

our mental powers,
our physical strength,
our wealth,
our abilities,
our possessions

— all should be used for God, and for His glory! When about to employ them, we should pause, and ask, "Will putting them to this use honor God? Will it serve His cause? Will it bring praise to His most holy name?"

All who see us, dwell with us, or visit us — should be able to perceive that we have written upon all we have and are, "Holy unto the Lord." Until they can, we are not what we ought to be — and God's end in what He has done for us, and conferred upon us, is not answered.

Brethren, what cause for humiliation, have we! How low before God we ought to lie! What deep and heart-felt repentance should we exercise! Can we look back — and not be sorry that we have been so unholy? Can we look within — and not be sorry that we are so unholy? Can we look around — and not grieve, that there are so few evidences of holiness in our present circumstances? Surely, if we saw things aright, if we felt aright — we would sigh and cry unto God, that He would forgive our past unholiness, and beseech Him to sanctify us wholly — and preserve

us, body, soul, and spirit, unblamable unto the day of Christ!

We should act upon the admonition of Paul: "Having therefore, dearly beloved, these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." Then would we exhibit the evidence of adoption presented by John: "Every one that has this hope in him, purifies himself, even as He is pure." Then should we be acknowledged as belonging to the company spoken of by Peter: "You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that you should show forth the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." And then would be brought to pass in us the saying of the prophet, "Their seed shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people; all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the Lord has blessed."

O Spirit of holiness, come down and by the finger of Your power — write, "Holiness unto the Lord!" upon our hearts! Enable us, as the effect, to write upon all we have and are, by all we purpose, plan, and do — "Holiness unto the Lord!" in large and pleasing characters, such as all may understand, and all the spiritual approve! truth, or God's ordinances; that we may bring glory to his most holy and ever-blessed name.

19 The Depths

The Depths "Out of the depths have I cried unto You, O Lord." Psalms 130:1 The Psalmist represents himself, as one in deep waters, or in deep caverns — in imminent peril — in deep distress — in sore trouble. Every Christian can more or less sympathize with him. All know something of the depths — but some sink lower, and continue longer in them than others. Generally speaking, those who sink deepest in soul distress — rise highest in spiritual enjoyment. The darker the night of sorrow — the brighter the day of deliverance appears. Those who can say, "The pains of Hell got hold upon me," can also add, "He brought me up, also, out of a horrible pit, He set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings: and He put a new song into my mouth, even praise unto our God."

Let us look at his SITUATION. "In the depths!" Ah, believer, we know what these depths mean! Into what depths we sunk when the law was brought home to the conscience, and the bar of equity was set up there. When vivid and soul-stinging convictions of sin were felt. The whole life seemed to be unfolded, and our secret sins set in the light of God's countenance. The heart was disclosed, and, Oh, the evils that were discovered there! What floods of corruption were rolling there — the waves whereof cast up mire and dirt. Then guilt pressed us down like a ponderous load; darkness, thick darkness enveloped the soul, we lost our foothold and began to sink!

Down we went into gloom, despondency, terror, alarm, and dread! All hope seemed to flee away, and our cry was, "I sink in the miry depths, where there is no foothold. I have come into the deep waters; the floods engulf me!" We felt as if we were now in the lowest pit, in darkness, and in the deeps. We dreaded going to sleep at night — lest we should awake in Hell. There seemed to be but a step, between us and the dreadful pit of hopeless despair. Satan pursued us with his horrid temptations, suggestions, and solicitations. The fearful thoughts he injected into the mind, the dreadful pictures he drew on the imagination, and the awful blasphemies he caused to roll through the soul — made us feel that we were in a "horrible pit" indeed, and the more we tried to extricate ourselves — the deeper we sunk, until "all hope that we should be saved, was then taken away."

These are, indeed, awful depths, and some souls have had to wade through them, not only days and weeks — but even months, and a few for years. At such times, providence often appears to run cross; relatives are unusually trying; Christians, perhaps, are cold towards us; and everything seems to conspire to plunge us deeper and deeper into the abyss! No tongue can describe, no language can set forth, what some poor Christians suffer in these depths. They do not attempt to tell another, they feel quite alone, and conclude that no one ever passed along that road to Heaven. Ah, this is a mistake! Many have found that the way to Heaven — is by the gates of Hell. Many sunk deep in the mire — before they too could place their foot upon the rock of ages; many have felt worse than Egyptian darkness — before they could say, "You have delivered my soul from death, and my eyes from tears, that I may walk before the Lord in the light of the living." Enough of this, let us consider his,

Application. "I cried unto the Lord." Words soon uttered — but what do they contain? Perhaps days of sorrow, nights of distress, weeks of agony, months of grief. "I cried unto the Lord." No one else could help, ease, or deliver me! This we learn by bitter experience. No arm can reach us in these depths — but the arm of God! No power can raise us up — but the power of God! The Lord knew where the Psalmist was, could hear his cry, and was alone able to deliver him. Would He deliver? There was a doubt upon this; more, a painful fear. But as no one else could help, it was in vain to look to any other quarter. The Lord encourages souls who are in the depths to cry unto Him, in many portions of His Word, and by the deliverances He has wrought for others. Not only so — but the Holy Spirit occasionally throws a ray of light into the soul, breaths for a moment into the troubled spirit, and excites the cry that enters into the ears of the Lord God Almighty. The sinner feels he must cry — or die! He must be delivered by the hand of God — or perish forever. His case is desperate — unless God interferes. As the soul is in the depths — so the cry comes up from the depths of the soul. No form of prayer will suit here, no human composition will meet the case now. The heart must pray, it must be the soul's own cry. "I cried unto the Lord." He felt deeply, he desired deliverance right heartily, he cried out energetically, and persevered in crying with importunity. By day and by night, at home and abroad, on the knees and when walking, at rest or in business, the cry still goes up, "O Lord, I beseech You, deliver my soul!"

Unbelief works, doubts discourage, delays dishearten, and Satan suggests, "It is all of no use!" But it is a cry for life, eternal life — and therefore the cry cannot be effectually silenced; the Holy Spirit is at work — and therefore, the enemy shall not prevail. This is striving to enter in at the strait gate. This is the kingdom of Heaven suffering violence, and the violent taking it by force. The cry was for deliverance: To be brought into liberty, the liberty with which the Lord makes His people free. To enjoy society and satisfaction; the society of saints, of Jesus, and God our Father; and to feel the satisfaction that flows from the pardon of sin, the Spirit of adoption, and the assurance of our acceptance with God. To walk in peace and holiness; with a peaceful conscience, "in all the ordinances and commandments of the Lord, blameless." To work for God, and his generation; not only enjoying deliverance — but rendering again, according to that which the Lord has done for us, and to glorify our God in the day of visitation. To be of use to others, and live to purpose in the present evil world.

Christian, there may be many depths between earth and Heaven; because you are out of one depth — you must not conclude that you will never get into another. Some have sunk into the depths even on a dying bed, and have cried out from the depths, just before they began to sing the new and never-ending song. Fresh convictions, trying dispensations, Satanic accusations, backsliding from God, or restraining prayer before God — may plunge us into fearful depths.

If we are not in the depths now — we soon may be, let him, therefore, "who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall." David said, "My mountain stands strong — I shall never be moved." And it was not likely that a mountain would move — but he immediately adds, "You hid your face, and I was troubled." If God hides His face from us, trouble and distress will soon overcome us.

Once in the depths — no one can deliver us out of them but Jesus, the Great Deliverer. The deeper we sink, the more singular will be our deliverance, and the greater glory will the Deliverer get. O what a contrast will the heights of the Heavenly Zion be — to the dreadful depths into which we sink in this wilderness world. To conclude, it is a sweet thought that not one of the Lord's

people ever perished in the depths yet. Jonah cried "out of the belly of Hell," when he was cast "into the deep," and the Lord heard and delivered him. Jeremiah cried out of "the low dungeon," and the Lord delivered him. Yes, poor soul, however low you sink, however much you suffer, however long you lie in the deeps — the great Shepherd will hear the bleatings of His poor sheep, the good Samaritan will come where you are — and you shall sing songs of deliverance to the honor of His name. However deep you sink — others have sunk as deep; however long you lie there — others have lain as long; however much you suffer — others have suffered more. And if you had but light, you might see that your Savior sunk lower than you, and left His footprints there!

Cry then, cry mightily to God, and the day of deliverance will soon dawn, and you will have cause to exclaim, "I love the Lord, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live. The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came upon me; I was overcome by trouble and sorrow. Then I called on the name of the Lord: 'O Lord, save me!' The Lord is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion." Psalms 116:1-5

19 The Value and Use of Blood

The Value and Use of Blood "Not without blood." Hebrews 9:7

Blood! There is something startling in the sound of blood, and often more startling in the sight of it. Yet every part of the Bible is sprinkled with blood; and from the sin of Adam — to the death of Jesus, God required blood. The blood is the life. When God gave man a being, he required that his life should be spent in his service, to his praise. When man failed to obey, his existence was forfeited — and blood was required. The Son of God, in the everlasting covenant, had engaged to shed His blood for us; in consequence of which, animal blood was demanded in sacrifice — until His blood should be shed. Abel sacrificed and offered blood — so did all the patriarchs. Thus they confessed guilt, acknowledged their desert, agreed to substitution, and exercised faith in a coming Savior.

Under the law, everything was sanctified with blood; priests and people, tabernacle and furniture, the book of the covenant, and even the mercy-seat. Blood was constantly kept before the eyes of the people; and in reference to access to God, acceptance with God, or obtaining blessings from God — the law said, "Not without blood." When the blood of Jesus was shed — no more blood was required: God was satisfied. But all our privileges, blessings, and enjoyments — now come to us through blood — the precious blood of Jesus. Are we redeemed? It is through the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. Are we justified? It is by His blood. Have we peace? It is through His blood. Let us look at a few particulars, and see the value and use of the blood.

There is no atonement without blood, for "it is the blood which makes atonement for the soul." The blood of Jesus alone could atone for sin. That met the Divine requirements, that honored the Divine government, that laid a foundation on which God and man could meet and be friends. We are reconciled to God — by the death of His Son. We have peace with God — by "faith in His blood." The blood of Jesus made a full, perfect, and everlasting atonement for all sin; that whoever believes may not perish — but have everlasting life.

There is no pardon without blood. We have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of our sins; but, without shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin. God's justice must be satisfied before His grace can be exercised toward sinners; and thus God is just, while He is the justifier of him who believes in Jesus. Through the blood, anyone may obtain pardon, for nothing is easier, nothing is more pleasant to God, than to pardon sinners for the sake of Jesus; hence it is written, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." But while God pardons every sinner who applies for pardon through the blood of Jesus — he will not pardon in any other way; for no blood — no pardon; no pleading the blood — no enjoyment of pardon.

There is no reconciliation to God without blood. Jesus has made peace through the blood of His cross; and it is at the cross, and at the cross alone — that God will meet sinners, and receive them

into His favor and friendship. God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself; and it is through the blood of Jesus — that He manifests His pity, compassion, and infinite love now; and it is the manifestation of His pity, compassion, and love — which breaks our hearts, produces evangelical repentance, fills us with holy love, and so reconciles us to God's character, perfections, and government.

There is no access to God without blood. The way to the mercy-seat was sprinkled with blood, and the blood in the basin was carried in the hand of the priest when he went into the holiest; so that the first thing that the eye of God saw, was the blood, and on account of that, he accepted both priest and people. It is through Jesus — Jesus as the slain Lamb — that we, both Jews and Gentiles, have access by one Spirit unto the Father. The new and living way into the holiest is consecrated for us by the blood of our great High Priest, and we have now access with confidence by the faith of Him.

There is no subduing sin without blood. Unpardoned sin is unconquered sin; for we can never subdue sin, unless it is brought into contact with the blood of Christ. If the weeds of sin fade and die — it is because the blood of Jesus is laid at the roots. The more we exercise faith in the blood of Jesus — the more power we gain over our corruptions, and the more easily we overcome our evil propensities.

There is no cleansing from sin without blood. Guilt will adhere to the conscience, torment the spirit, confuse the judgment, and produce a thousand horrid fears — until the blood of Jesus is sprinkled upon it. But if we walk in the light, as our God is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. All sin — every sin — every stain — every trace of sin! Thus the blood of Christ purges our consciences from dead works, to serve the living and the true God. Precious, precious blood of Jesus!

There is no conquering Satan without blood. He cares not for our reasonings. He laughs at many of our feeble attempts to conquer him. But the blood of Jesus makes him tremble and flee before us. Hence it is written of the tempted and persecuted saints of old, that though the old serpent the Devil deceived the whole world — "they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives unto the death." Satan will surely flee before us, if we resist him steadfast in the faith; steadfastly believing in the infinite virtue and everlasting efficacy of the blood of Jesus.

There is no walking with God without blood. No criminal can be permitted to enjoy the friendship and fellowship of the Sovereign; and such are we, until the blood is apprehended by us, and applied to us. If I would come to God, enjoy peace with God, realize acceptance before God, and hold close and intimate communion with God — it must be through the blood of His dear Son! I must therefore daily use the blood, washing my robes and making them white in the blood of the Lamb.

There is no peace in death without blood. Death dissipates a thousand vain imaginations, destroys a thousand false refuges, and strips off a thousand false coverings. Many have found that what did for health and ease — will not do for sickness and death. Nothing but the blood of Christ, at the root of our profession, as the ground of our hope, as our plea at the throne of grace — will give us peace in the hour of death. But if we see the worth and excellency of the blood of Jesus, if we rely

on it alone for our acceptance with God, if we oppose it to our sins, doubts, and fears — there will be peace; solid, settled, substantial peace. There is no admission to Heaven — without blood! Our title-deeds must be signed with blood, or our claim to the Heavenly mansions will not be admitted. We go to Heaven — because Jesus left it, came to earth, and died to entitle us to it; and if we attempt to go on any other grounds, we shall be rejected and eternally expelled. No blood — no Heaven. The priest dared not enter the holiest of all, which typified Heaven, without blood; nor shall we be allowed to pass over the threshold of the celestial city — without the blood of Jesus on us.

Finally, no boldness at the judgment, without blood. This alone will blot out our sins, justify our persons, meet all the demands made upon us, and silence every accuser who rises up against us. Only the blood of Jesus will do all this! For ten thousand worlds, I would not meet God in judgment — without the blood of Jesus. But if His blood . . .

satisfies justice,

magnifies the law,

harmonizes the Divine attributes,

blots out all my sins,

justifies my person,

cleanses my garments,

silences all my accusers, and

brings the greatest possible glory to God by my salvation

— why should I fear the judgment? Shall I not boldly face it, and with everlasting joy rejoice in my acquittal at it? Precious blood of Jesus! I will seek grace to have more to do with You, to exercise more confidence in You, and to speak more of You than ever I have done!

There must be blood on the altar — where we place our sacrifices.

There must be blood on that mercy-seat — where we offer our prayers.

There must be blood on the conscience — when it passes its verdict.

For, except this is the case . . .

our sacrifices will not be accepted,

our prayers will not be heard, and

our consciences will condemn us. In reference therefore to every duty I perform, every privilege I enjoy, every prospect I anticipate — I will say, "Not without blood!" In reference to every hope I cherish, every blessing I desire, every conquest I seek — I will say, "Not without blood!"

I will expect ...

no peace of conscience,

no joy in the Holy Spirit,

no success in my work,

no admission into Heaven,

without blood! But for all I ask of God, for all I desire in time, and all I hope for in eternity — I will plead the blood of Jesus, and the blood of Jesus alone! No blood — no pardon! No blood — no peace! No blood — no vigorous graces! No blood — no salvation! For all religion is delusion, all faith is presumptuous, all joys are deceptions — which do not spring from, or which are not sustained by, the blood of the Lamb, slain from the foundation of the world!

20 Mercy Inviting the Backslider

Mercy Inviting the Backslider

"Return, backsliding Israel, says the Lord. I will not look on you with anger, for I am unfailing in My love. I will not be angry forever. Only acknowledge your iniquity—you have rebelled against the Lord your God. You have scattered your favors to strangers under every green tree and have not obeyed My voice!" Jeremiah 3:12-13 The historical portions of God's Word are a mirror in which we may see, on the one hand: what is in our hearts — and what would be in our lives under particular circumstances; and on the other hand, what is in the heart of God — and how His perfections are displayed in dealing with his people.

What we read of Israel — is true of us; for as in water face answers to face, so does the heart of man to man. And what we read of God — is still true of Him. He says, "I am the Lord, I change not, therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed." His dealings may change — but not His nature, for He is "without variableness, or shadow of turning." Israel sinned, and God punished them; but now they are in affliction. He pities them, and sends this loving message to them. We will notice,

First, the invitation. "Return, backsliding Israel, says the Lord." The figure is taken from the heifer at plough, which slides back when it ought to go forward and cut the furrow. Israel went backward, and not forward; and now they are gone far from the Lord, He sends his invitation to them to return. He had been exceeding kind to them, from Egypt until now. He expected better things from them. He says, "But I was the one who planted you, choosing a vine of the purest stock—the very best. How did you grow into this corrupt wild vine?" He complains, "I looked for a crop of good grapes — but it yielded only bad fruit." He expected obedience — but behold, rebellion; he looked for worship, and behold, backsliding. Their conduct was base. But has ours been better? His kindness has been shown to us — infinite, unmerited kindness. He expects us to glorify Him in our bodies and spirits which are His. But have we? Do we? How justly might He cut us off! But instead thereof — He invites us to return. He calls us back to His ordinances, not to rest in them — but to ascend to Himself. He is on his throne of grace, and his ordinances are intended to be as so many steps, by which we may ascend to that throne.

He says, "Return unto Me." We should come with confession, acknowledging our iniquities; with sorrow, grieving over our misconduct; with prayer, pleading for pardon, restoration, and greater grace. The invitation is from His own loving heart, it flows spontaneously from thence; that heart which we had grieved by our sins; which had threatened to punish our follies; but which still loved us, with an infinite, unutterable love.

Secondly, here is an inducement to return. A promise, a glorious promise. "I will not look on you with anger." His paternal anger had been roused against us — we greatly deserved that it should be poured out upon us; it was suspended over us, like the storm-cloud in the day of tempest — but returning to Him would prevent the execution of the threatening. He is reluctant to punish. "His anger endures but a moment." When most deeply grieved, He feels as if He could not give us up;

hence He exclaims, "Oh, how can I give you up, Israel? How can I let you go? How can I destroy you like Admah or demolish you like Zeboiim? My heart is torn within me, and my compassion overflows. No, I will not unleash my fierce anger. I will not completely destroy Israel, for I am God and not a mere mortal. I am the Holy One living among you, and I will not come to destroy." O the power, the patience, the long-suffering of divine love!

Thirdly, here is the source of all, here is the reason assigned for this loving invitation. "I am merciful, says the Lord." That is, I am FULL of mercy. The ocean is not so full of water, the sun is not so full of light — as God is full of mercy. No one can conceive the greatness of God's mercy. We must grasp infinity, and measure eternity — before we can calculate the extent of Divine mercy.

It is tender mercy, the mercy of a Father, who is full of pity.

It is free mercy, mercy flowing spontaneously from God's benevolent nature — neither caused, nor called forth by anything in us. For as light flows freely from the sun, and water rolls in freely from the ocean — so does mercy flow freely from our gracious and covenant God.

It is constant mercy, for "the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting." We stand in its center, and it surrounds us like an immeasurable circle. We stand on it, as on a rock in the midst of the ocean, whose waters spread out in every direction, far beyond sight, or even thought. "His mercies are new every morning, and great is His faithfulness.

He adds, "I will not be angry with you forever." "In a surge of anger I hid My face from you for a moment, but I will have compassion on you with everlasting love, says the Lord your Redeemer."

He will forgive, blotting out our sins as a cloud, and our iniquities as a thick cloud. He will forget our misconduct, as He has said, "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more."

He will restore. He will restore our souls which had wandered, to His pasture, and His fold. He will restore unto us the joys of His salvation, which we had forfeited and lost. O the amazing, the unparalleled grace of God!

See then, how basely man acts. How basely we have acted! He brought us into His ways, set a mark before us, and a crown beyond it — and bid us patiently run the race set before us, looking unto Jesus, as our great example. But we lost sight of the mark, we forgot the crown, we took our eye off the Savior, and we wandered upon every mountain and hill, until we had forgotten our resting-place! So foolish, so ungrateful, so base were we! But has God given us up? Has He discarded us? Is His mercy clean gone forever? Will He be favorable no more? Has He in anger shut up His loving-kindness? O no! See how wondrously God loves! He calls to us, "Return unto Me!" He sends His servants, and says, "Go, and proclaim these words, and say: Return, backsliding Israel. I will not look on you with anger, for I am unfailing in My love. I will not be angry forever. Only acknowledge your iniquity!" What wondrous love! What infinite mercy! What tender compassion! Surely, if anything will melt the heart, fill the eyes with tears, and the mouth with confession — this will.

How powerfully He prompts us to return. As if He had said, "Fear not — though you are so guilty; doubt not — though you are so vile. Think not that I will refuse you, or that I will execute my

threatenings upon you. I will not. I give you my word, before you turn your faces toward me, or take one step in the way back, that I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you. Nay, I will receive you graciously, I will love you freely, I will pardon you heartily, and restore you to peace and joy!"

"Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea!" How low He stoops, how wondrously He condescends.

We have willfully and wickedly wandered. Our conduct grieved Him at His heart — and yet He entreats us to come back. He urges us to return. He promises to forgive and forget all the past, treating us as if we had not sinned, or dishonored His blessed name.

Let us then accept His invitation. Let us turn unto Him at once with weeping and with supplication. Let us say, with the church of old, "I will go, and return to my first Husband, for then it was better with me than now." Or, "Come, and let us return unto the Lord; for He has torn — and He will heal us; He has smitten — and He will bind us up."

Then will the parable of the prodigal son, become a great fact in our history; and there will be joy in Heaven, in the presence of the angels of God, when we are brought to repentance. "Return unto me — and I will return unto you, says the Lord." "Behold, Lord, we come unto You, for You are the Lord our God!"

21 The Christian's Walk

The Christian's Walk "We walk by faith, not by sight." 2 Corinthians 5:7 There are two paths in which we have to walk.

1. We have to walk to God, as sinners, for acceptance; and the path is Jesus, and Jesus alone. Not Jesus — and our feelings; nor Jesus — and our good works; but Jesus alone. He said, "No man comes unto the Father — but by Me."
2. We have to walk to Heaven, as justified and accepted believers; and the path is filial obedience to God's will.

If I seek acceptance with God, as the Judge of all, I exclude everything but Jesus, and expect to be accepted for the alone sake of Jesus, and what He has done and suffered. But if I look upon myself as a child of God, going home to his Heavenly Father, through a wilderness of trials and troubles — then the precept marks my path, and good works are required at my hands. The principle that actuates the believer, is faith. Does he seek acceptance with God through Jesus? — it is by faith. Does he seek to do the will of God from the heart? — it is by faith. What does his faith include?

1. Crediting God's Word. He believes what God has said concerning His beloved Son. He believes what God requires, as expressed in His holy precepts. He is fully persuaded of the truth of God's Word, and assents to it.
2. Trusting Christ's merits. He renounces all his own supposed excellency, casts away all his own performances, and places his sole trust in the obedience and blood shedding of the Lord Jesus. On Christ, and Christ alone, he relies for pardon, peace with God, and admission into Heaven.
3. Confiding in God's care. He believes that God cares for him, will take care of him, and fulfill his promises to him. He sees that the end of his life is to please God, and to leave himself and all his concerns in God's hands while doing so. That anxiety is unfitting, which fears. It indicates unbelief, and that it is his privilege to cast every care on God, who cares for him.
4. Observing God's precepts. This is not faith — but it is the immediate and inevitable effect of it; so that where there is not a careful observance of God's precepts — there is no living faith. Men may pretend to believe — but they do not. They may talk of faith — but they do not possess it. "For as the body without the spirit is dead — so faith without works is dead also." The Christian, as influenced by a living faith, makes progress. He goes from stage to stage, from strength to strength. He walks after the Lord. His walk leads him nearer to God, and faith realizes more and more of the Divine presence. He walks more with God. The world loses its attractions, and old sinful habits lose their power. He finds full satisfaction nowhere but in God's presence, with no one but with God himself. Fellowship with God becomes necessary to his existence; and, as a social being — he could as soon be happy without society, as, being a Christian — he could be happy without communion with God. He learns to walk . . .

with more courage — resisting the devil, and overcoming the world;

with more confidence — trusting in Christ, and committing all to Christ;

with more constancy — not so prone to wander, or be diverted or charmed by the occurrences of time;

with more comfort — resting on the promises, rejoicing in the doctrines, and deriving fuller supplies from God. As he gets nearer to God — he gets further from the world, and enters into closer fellowship with the saints. He walks more humbly, as he learns more of himself, and more of his dependance upon God. He walks more prayerfully, as he realizes his danger, and his need of daily supplies of the Spirit of Christ. He grows in acquaintance with the truth, especially as revealing the mind of God, and setting forth the person and personal glories of the Lord Jesus. He realizes more and more the solemnity of eternity, and the importance of being built on a sure foundation, and being made fit to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light.

Faith is at the root of all this; and the comfort, quickness, and consistency of the Christian's walk — is just in proportion to his faith.

Let us then, as believers in Jesus, seek to walk by faith, and not by sight. Let us go forward as seeing Him who is invisible. Let us endure toil, trouble, and temptation — not looking at the things which are seen — but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal — but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Let us daily walk — looking unto Jesus. He is our adorable Redeemer. He is our source of supply. Looking to Him will . . .

enlighten us in darkness,

cheer us in solitude,

strengthen us in weakness,

fortify us in conflict,

embolden us in danger,

comfort us in sorrow, and

render us more than conquerors over every foe.

Let us daily walk leaning on Jesus. He will be at our side, He will lend us His arm, yes, His bosom! The posture of the Church should be ours, "Who is this that comes up out of the wilderness, leaning on her Beloved?" It is the Church of Christ, and her example should be followed by every Christian.

Let us daily walk communing with Jesus. He loves to converse with us, and to receive communications from us. Let us tell Him of our foes, fears, afflictions, privations, griefs, and woes. Let us tell Him everything that tries or troubles us. He says, "Let me hear your voice." Yes, O Savior, You shall hear me; for I will bring all my sorrows and joys, all my trials and triumphs, all my doubts and deliverances — to You!

Let us daily walk imitating Jesus. He has left us an example, that we should follow in His footsteps. In the family, in the world, and in the church — let us endeavor to imitate Jesus. And may we receive grace to conform our conduct to His, that all who see us may take knowledge of us, that we have learned of Him who is "meek and humble in heart;" who was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners."

O for such a faith as will lead us to God through Christ — that we may be pardoned, justified, and accepted by Him; that will lead us to live in the world — so as to prove that we are not of it, enabling us to do the will of God from the heart while we are passing through it! May our spirit, temper, course, and conduct conspire to bear testimony that "we walk by faith — and not by sight."

"By faith in Christ I walk with God,
With Heaven, my journey's end in view;
Supported by His staff and rod,
My road is safe and pleasant too.
I travel through a desert wide,
Where many round me blindly stray;
But He vouchsafes to be my Guide,
And will not let me miss my way.
Though snares and dangers throng my path,
And earth and Hell my course withstand;
I triumph over all by faith,
Guarded by His Almighty hand. The wilderness affords me food,
But God for my support prepares;
Provides me every needful good,
And frees my soul from needs and cares."

22 Mercy and Salvation Sought

Mercy and Salvation Sought "Show us Your mercy, O Lord, and grant us Your salvation." Psalms 85:7 The church recognizes God's goodness, and pleads the grace He has displayed. She pleads that He has been favorable to His land, has brought back the captivity of Jacob, has forgiven the iniquity of His people, taken away all His wrath, and turned from the fierceness of His anger. Then she prays that He would turn her, revive her, rejoice her heart, and do so by showing His mercy, and granting His salvation.

We should look back to see what the Lord has done, to encourage us to seek and expect blessings at His hands. If the Lord has given us one spiritual blessing, He intends to give us more. Each is introductory to some other. If He begins a good work — He will carry it on. If He has a favor toward us — He will bring us to His feet, teach us to pray, give us penitence, produce faith in our hearts, enable us to wait and hope, and then grant us His salvation.

"Show us Your mercy, O Lord." Reveal, display, and exert it. Mercy supposes misery — and misery supposes sin; for all misery flows from sin. Sin is the source — and misery, in its various forms, is the stream which flows from that evil fountain. Mercy is the antidote of misery — God's antidote. Mercy removes misery by a free pardon, inward sanctification, and holy employment. It blots out our sins, changes our dispositions, and sets us to work for God and His glory. Mercy is from God. He is its Author, and he exercises it as a Sovereign and a Father.

There is no sovereignty in divine justice, God is just alike to all; there is no sovereignty in divine punishment, for every one is punished just in proportion to his guilt; but divine mercy is sovereignly exercised. Do we refer to the object? "I will have mercy — on whom I will have mercy." Or do we refer to the exercise of it? "I will be merciful — because I will be merciful." As a Governor — God is strictly and impartially just; as a Father — God is freely and sovereignly merciful. Mercy is sometimes peculiarly displayed. To particular persons, as to David, Manasseh, Jonah, and Saul of Tarsus. To a particular people, as to Israel especially in Egypt.

(N.B. Two pages are missing here.)

God's mercy will satisfy the longing soul, and fill the hungry soul with goodness. If we drink of this stream, let us follow it up to its source, which is the God of mercy. It flows from Him freely, plentifully, continually; and whoever will, may come and take of these waters of life freely.

Reader, do you feel the need of mercy? Have you sought it? Have you found it? Do you enjoy it? Do you praise it? Do you commend it to others? Do you desire salvation? a salvation from all sin, all wrath, all penal sufferings? a salvation full of blessings, as free as the air, as lasting as eternity? It may be had. It may be had by you. It may be had by you now. There is nothing to hinder your enjoying it — but your own unbelief and hardness of heart. You must be saved — or lost. You must be unspeakably happy — or inconceivably miserable, and that forever! Which shall it be? O which? Let your prayer, your heart-felt prayer, your daily, yes hourly prayer, be, "Show me Your mercy, O Lord; and grant me Your salvation!" Then will you soon have to own, "He has saved me,

and called me with a holy calling; not according to my works — but according to His own purpose and grace which was given me in Christ Jesus before the world began."

23 Affliction Regarded

Affliction Regarded "Nevertheless He regarded their affliction — when He heard their cry." Psalms 106:44

Sin is that horrible thing which God hates! Sin nowhere appears so hateful to God — as when seen in His own people! In them it has peculiar aggravations, for He has shown such love to them, suffered and done so much for them, and conferred so many and such great blessings upon them. Christian, your sins, and mine, have peculiar aggravations. They touch the loving heart of God. They grieve Him. They cause Him to chastise us — and to lay us low.

Nothing ought to affect us as much as sin. It should humble us. It should break our hearts, and fill us with sorrow. Sins before conversion are bad — but sins after conversion are a thousand times worse.

Israel's conduct, very correctly represents ours; and the conduct of God towards Israel, very correctly represents God's conduct towards us. The text refers to these points. Let us consider then, Their CONDITION. They were afflicted, deeply afflicted. The enemy had possession of them, dealt harshly with them, and sorely oppressed them. Such is our case at times, as it is written, "Fools suffered affliction — because of their rebellious ways and their sins. They came near the gates of death!" Our afflictions are sometimes in body.

Whatever their nature — God selects them!

Whatever part they attack — God directs them!

However long they continue — God commissions them!

There is no chance in the case — nor is there any mistake.

Sin, one sin — generally brings bitter sorrow. But perhaps more are afflicted in mind than in body. Sometimes we are left in doubt and darkness; we can neither read over evidences, nor see our way. All our Ebenezers are obscured as it were in mist, and gloom and sadness rests upon the soul. The past appears delusion, the present dreary, and the future perilous. We do business in deep waters, while neither sun, moon, nor stars appear. The mind sinks, hope is ready to give way; and then comes temptations and terrors. Temptations to sin, to desperation, and to despair. Temptations accompanied with power, such power as causes alarm, affright, and distressing agitations. O the distress of soul, which some have to wade through, in consequence of Satanic influence, the Lord hiding His face, and the terrible rebukes of an honest conscience! Such are generally, at such times, very tender of sin, and walk softly before the Lord.

Many believers are afflicted in their circumstances. Providence frowns upon them. They have many claims and expenses which they cannot meet, or can only do so with the utmost difficulty. Their brook, like Elijah's, dries up. The resources seem to fail. Vexation and disappointments try and harrass the mind, for they have many wants and woes. What they have — they cannot enjoy,

on account of the claims for what they have not. And they have to learn out in this trial, that they are as much dependant upon God, for the power of enjoyment, as they are for power to obtain.

Many are the afflictions of the righteous. The Lord's people are a poor and afflicted people. They have to eat the paschal lamb with bitter herbs; and Oh! how bitter they sometimes are!

We will now consider the CAUSE of this — and look at their previous CONDUCT. The proceeding verses of the Psalm gives us a fearful, and affecting picture of it.

It was disobedience, for "they did not destroy the nations concerning whom the Lord commanded them." They were made executioners of God's just wrath — but they spared His daring foes. In like manner do we spare our bosom sins, and darling lusts!

It was disbelieving, for "they despised the pleasant land, they believed not His Word." He had set the land before them, and promised to bring them into it; but they would not believe Him, so that "they could not enter therein, because of their unbelief." Has not this been our case — have we not despised the pleasant land set before us, by preferring the wilderness, or the Egypt of this world, unto it? Have we not doubted sometimes God's veracity, sometimes his faithfulness, perhaps, and often, very often, His love? Alas, alas, we have!

It was idolatrous, for they "were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works, and they served their idols, which were a snare unto them." Just so we, instead of being separate from the world, and proving that we are not of the world, have mixed with it, and idolized fashion, wealth, and fame. We have placed Mammon on the throne of Jehovah! We have learned the ways of the world as to tricks in trade, carnal contrivances, and worldly practices. We have set up an idol in our hearts, in our houses, and even in our temples!

It was cruel, for "They shed innocent blood — the blood of their sons and daughters whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; so the land became polluted with blood!" Psalms 106:38. We may plead guiltless as to the shedding of the blood of the body — but there is the blood of souls. How many of us have sacrificed our children to the idols of the present Canaan — fashion, custom, dress, dancing, and worldly conformity in general.

Look at the poor example we give them!

Look at the worldly company we choose for them!

Look at the carnal practices we allow them to indulge in! Can it be said, that we realize the value of the soul, and seek first and principally the salvation of our children and friends, with the glory of God? O how many of our children have been sacrificed to custom, fashion, and the various idols of the world!

It was ungrateful, for they not only "despised the pleasant land," but "they provoked the spirit of Moses, so that he spoke unadvisedly with his lips." Here too we are guilty, for by our conduct we have provoked, perplexed, and grieved God's ministers, and have been a great trouble to them. We now turn to, Their CRY. "They cried unto the Lord in their trouble." This cry arose from anguish of soul and distress of mind. They felt that they must have vent, for the sorrow that was shut up in the heart could not otherwise be borne.

It was a right hearty cry. It was to God — to God against whom they had sinned, who had brought them into distress, who alone could deliver them. It was with fervor — the energetic cry, which had feeling, energy, and power in it. The cry that God could not refuse.

Many of our cries are so formal, so heartless, that they make no impression upon God — but there are cries that enter into the ears, sink into the heart, and stir up all the sympathies of the Lord God Almighty.

It continued until they were delivered. Do we need a blessing? Do we ask a favor? Do we seek Divine intervention? We must persevere in our application. We must not only ask — but seek; nor leave off at seeking — but knock. Like the importunate widow, we must cry until we obtain what we need. Like the friend who wanted bread, we must persevere until we obtain. As God's elect, we must cry day and night unto God, until He have mercy upon us. We now glance at, Their COMFORT. "Nevertheless He regarded their affliction, when He heard their cry." Their cry was so piteous, so touching, that He could not resist. How much comfort is sometimes wrapped up in a word. This word, "nevertheless," is full of holy comfort, and the Bible is full of instances in which it is thus used. Hence Nehemiah confesses, when he had acknowledged Israel's sins, "Nevertheless, for Your great mercies sake — You did not utterly consume them, nor forsake them; for You are a gracious and merciful God." So David, "I said in my haste I am cut off from before your eyes; nevertheless You heard the voice of my supplication when I cried unto You." So the Lord Himself, alluding to His backsliding people, "Nevertheless, I will never stop loving him nor fail to keep my promise to him. No, I will not break my covenant; I will not take back a single word I said." So before, in this very Psalm of which we are considering, "Nevertheless He saved them for His names sake, that He might make His mighty power to be known."

Thus the Lord comforts His poor, polluted, and unworthy people. Nevertheless! What grace — what free, sovereign, patient, all conquering, grace! He regarded their affliction — what pity! "Like a father pities his children — so the Lord pities those who fear Him, He knows our frame, He remembers that we are dust."

He wrought for them with men, "He made them also to be pitied, by all those who carried them captives." He impressed His own feeling upon the hearts of their very enemies — and they pitied them. Who is a God like unto our God?

He effected their deliverance to the glory of His own name, and blessed be that holy name; it shall be glorified in our ultimate, complete, and everlasting deliverance, from all sin, all sorrow, all darkness, all fears, and all foes!

Then, let us never despair — as vile as we are — as sinful as our conduct may have been — as guilty as we feel ourselves to be — let us never despair! Nevertheless, gives us hope. Nevertheless, will shine in our pardon, peace, and perfect purity. We are poor, vile, polluted, unworthy, backsliding, ungrateful, wretched creatures; nevertheless, He will regard our affliction when He hears us cry.

Let us still cry. We may have to cry long and loud — but we shall not cry in vain. He who put the cry into our heart — will hear it, own it, honor it, and answer it. My poor, afflicted, dejected friend — CRY oh, and give the Lord no rest, until He arises and has mercy upon you. Though He seems now to close His ear, and turn His back — He will turn again, He will have compassion upon you,

and will cast all your sins into the depths of the sea!

Let us yet expect. Our case is not, cannot be desperate. With the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption. He is plenteous in mercy unto all those who call upon Him. However tried, therefore, however tempted, however low we may have sunk — let us not despair, let us still cry mightily to God, and let us yet expect that He will arise and have mercy upon us! "Nevertheless He regarded their affliction — when He heard their cry." Psalms 106:44

24 The Place to Choose

The Place to Choose "But when you are invited — take the lowest place." Luke 14:10

PRIDE is peculiarly offensive to God. He will not allow it in His presence! He cannot smile upon the person who indulges it. It was exceedingly offensive to Jesus — the meek and humble Jesus. It was the exact contrast of Himself. He testified against it in His life. He reproved it with His tongue. When He saw His fellow countrymen, indulging in this sin at a feast, choosing the best and most prominent places — He put forth a parable to reprove them, and instruct His disciples. He did not say keep away from them exactly, or refuse all invitations to festivity; but when you do go — manifest humility — take the lowest place — show a humble disposition — because I command you. Leave your reputation to others. "He who humbles himself — shall be exalted."

It is not so much the place, as the spirit which prompts us to take it! For a man may take the lowest place — with the proudest heart! But in general, the state of the heart — manifests itself by the conduct. The humble will take the lowest place. The humble will go and stand by the publican, not proudly go up before the veil with the Pharisee. Jesus here gives us, A DIRECTION. "But when you are invited — take the lowest place." That is, be humble, and appear humble. Have low views of yourselves. Keep your own sinfulness, misery, and deservings — before your eyes. Never forget your sinful origin, your former character, your deserved doom; and that all the difference between you and the vilest — must be ascribed to free and sovereign grace. "For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have — that you did not receive? And if you did receive it — why do you boast as though you did not?" 1 Corinthians 4:7 Have low views of your talents — do not boast, if God has given you many. Do not pride yourself upon what is only lent you, and may be recalled at any moment. Have you any reason to be proud of that which increases your responsibility, lays you under deeper obligations, is intended to be only used to the glory of the God, and for the use of which, you must give an account? Have low views of your acquirements, they are not what they might have been — so that you have nothing to boast of. Have low views of your rights — few have correct views here. As men — we have our rights among our fellow men; but as sinners — what rights have we before God? The rights of a rebel in arms against his Sovereign? The rights of a subdued rebel? The rights of a vile traitor? Who talks of these 'rights'? What are these 'rights' among men — but the rights of the prison, the chopping-block, or the noose? What are the rights of a sinner before God — but condemnation, and eternal punishment in Hell? Oh, let us be humble — for humility befits us! Have low thoughts of your place.

What was it originally? The dung-hill!

What — but for grace, would it have been eternally? The bottomless pit!

What should it be now? The dust, the lowest place!

Oh, Christian, we can never lay too low before God, we can never be too humble in God's church; and even among our fellow men, we shall only be respected the more, if we show that like our beloved master — that we are meek and humble of heart! "Better to be of a humble spirit with the

humble, than to divide the spoil with the proud." Consider now, The DESIGN of this direction. It is to try the spirits. There are many false spirits, gone forth into the world in the name of Christ. There are in the church, many spirits, beside the Spirit of Christ. Among real Christians, there is often a great lack of real humility. Here is the test, are you willing with Paul to sit lowest, as "least of the Apostles," "less than the least of all saints," "the chief of sinners". Oh, this lowest place tries many! They cannot take it. The proud spirit will not stoop to it. What, am I to be considered nothing? Am I to wash the feet of saints who are poor day laborers, fishermen, and mere servants? You know Jesus did, and said, "I have left you an example — that you should do as I have done unto you."

Oh, the lowest place tries the spirit! It is to test our principles, we profess self-annihilating principles — but do we possess them? Are we prepared to be nothing? To be saved as nothing. To be used as nothing. That is, as not deserving the Lord's notice, as unworthy of the Lord's regard. How easy to profess the self-denying principles of the gospel, yet how hard to practice them. How many use the cloak. They cover pride — with the cloak of humility; and SELF — with the robe of the Savior. But it will not do; we are in the sight of God — as the heart is. The professed principles of many, point them to the lowest place — but they take the highest place, and claim it as a right.

It is to prevent pride, which Jesus hates; and prejudice, which injures the church; and disappointment, which harrasses the spirit; and confusion, which fills with agitation and distress. Out Lord would have us ornamental, useful, and happy; therefore he says, "Take the lowest place." We will now more particularly consider the Reasons why we should take the lowest place.

Because Jesus took the lowest place — He made himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, a slave; He made Himself servant of all, lowest of all; He pleased not Himself. He was among His disciples — as one that serves. He was at every ones beck and call. He refused no one — but did all, and everything that was requested of Him; and said, "It is enough for the servant — that he be as his Lord."

Because the greatest Apostle took the lowest place. He said, "I am not worthy to be called an Apostle." Again, "Though I am free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might save the more." He adds, "Be imitators of Me, even as I also am of Christ." "Give no offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, not to the Church of God. Even as I please all men, not seeking my own profit — but the profit of many, that they may be saved."

Because all do take the lowest place, just in proportion as they know themselves, realize the power of free grace, and walk closely with God. The experimental knowledge of ourselves — will be sure to humble us; the sensible power of the grace of God — will lay us lower still; but nearness to God — will annihilate self altogether, and we shall feel that we are nothing, less than nothing, and vanity!

Because taking the lowest place — qualifies us to rise, for "before honor is humility," and commends us to God, to godly men, and to conscience. The Lord has respect to the humble. He says, "This is the one I esteem — he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my Word!" The less we are in our own eyes — the more we rise in the estimation of the godly wise. And when we lie low, and act under the power of self-abasement, conscience like a good friend, is sure to commend us.

Once more, because it ensures our commendation, and a higher place. The master of the spiritual feast will come in by-and-by, and looking with a loving eye upon the man in the lowest place, will say, "Friend, come up higher!" Then all eyes will be turned upon him, and he will have reverence and respect shown him. We may be allowed to keep the lowest place, you see, even until the master comes; men may not exalt us — but when He comes, every man will have due praise of God. My brother, the lowest place — is the safest place. There are no shameful falls from here. The man who chooses the lowest place — will escape much of the envy, jealousy, and strife of tongues, from which others suffer; and be permitted to pursue the even tenor of his way, proving, that "godliness with contentment is great gain." The lowest place — is the happiest place. Jesus is often with us there. He feeds among the lilies. He walks among the myrtle trees, that are in the valley. The man in the lowest place, escapes most trouble, and enjoys most comfort. He who sits lowest — is most clearly a Christian, there is no doubt about him, whatever there may be about others, for he is so like Jesus, there is so much of the spirit, temper, and disposition of Jesus about him. His calling and election are sure. Observers will say of Him, if there is a Christian in the world — that is the man."

Many admire — and few envy him. He makes no noise — but he does much good, and brings great honor to God.

Sitting in the lowest place, is the way to have peace in the Church, prosperity in the soul, and success in the Lord's work. The humble never strive, except it be to honor Jesus. They never contend, except it is for the faith. They never wrestle — but against principalities and powers in Heavenly places. They prosper in their souls, for in the lowest place — faith grows exceedingly, love burns with a glowing heat, hope roots in the rock of ages, and peace increases until it surpasses all understanding.

Those who sit lowest — do most good. God can trust them, without fear of being robbed by them; he can use them, certain that He shall not be dishonored by them. These are the vessels of honor, fit and prepared for the Master's use. The lower we are — the nearer to Jesus, and the greater our blessings. The snow remains unmelted on the lofty mountain peaks, while the valleys smoke with heat; the rain runs from the hills — but penetrates, settles in, and fructifies the valleys. So the sun of righteousness, pours its light and heat into the humble soul; and the Holy Spirit like living waters, flows and fills the humble spirit.

Blessed position! May the lowest place be mine — with all its attendant blessings!

But, reader, let nothing keep you from the feast which Jesus has made, the glorious gospel feast; he invites you to come, you are heartily welcome, and if coming — you take the lowest place, you will have some choice portions sent you from Him who presides, and bade you come. The woman in the Pharisee's house, went behind the guests, took her place at the feet of Jesus; but to her alone, the Savior said, "Woman, your sins are forgiven — go in peace." Take her place, in her spirit, and you shall have her portion; even a full pardon, blessed peace, and the sense of acceptance in your soul.

25 Hezekiah's Prayer

Hezekiah's Prayer "O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me." Isaiah 38:14

If grace will not make us pray — trouble shall! Our troubles are often sent from God — to lead us to God. Hezekiah was a good man and a great man; high in station and useful in his day — but deeply tried. If he had not been so deeply tried — he would never have been so useful. But for his affliction — he would never have prayed as he did; if he had not so prayed, he had not been so remarkably delivered; if he had not been so delivered, he had not composed this writing; and if he had not written his experience, we should not have been benefitted by him as we have been.

We now see that believers are pretty much the same, whether they live in a palace — or a cottage, sway a scepter — or work at a trade. Hezekiah, under the moonlight of the law, was very much like some of us who are under the sun-light of the gospel. We can claim relationship to him, and enjoy fellowship with him. We will now,

First, consider his COMPLAINT. "O Lord, I am oppressed!" He complains to the Lord — this was right; had he complained of the Lord, it would have been wrong. We should carry all our complaints to our Father, not to men; and let us never complain of that to others which we cannot or do not, spread before the Lord in prayer.

"I am oppressed." And who has not been? What Christian is not? Some are oppressed by their fellow-men. The magistrate, the master, the menial, have all been oppressors in their turn. Sin produces selfishness, and selfishness is always cruel. Many of the brethren of Jesus are under the iron hand of oppression in America, as slaves; and in other places, as servants. They must submit, for they cannot get away. They are under the yoke, and they cannot break loose. Oppression in temporal things is bad, very bad; but there is an oppression that is worse than that.

Satan is a great oppressor. By his vile suggestions, base insinuations, alarming misrepresentations, and cruel buffetings — he burdens, distresses, and bows down the soul. Oh, how he oppresses, the poor, the weak, the wavering, and weary ones of the Lord's family! Hence the Lord has said, when his patience can bear no more, "Because of the oppression of the weak and the groaning of the needy, I will now arise. I will protect them from those who malign them."

Slavish fears often oppress us. Unfounded fears of the wrath or displeasure of God, of being overcome by our numerous and determined foes, or of falling away from our profession of Jesus our beloved Lord. But unbelief is the chief cause of all our oppression. Had we faith in God's love, in Christ's work, in our covenant union to Jesus; did we believe the promises and doctrines of the gospel with reference to ourselves — we would be light, lively, cheerful, and vigorous. But an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God, brings us into bondage, darkness, doubt, and gloom. Then we feel oppressed. We cannot breathe freely. Prayer is irksome. The Bible is dry. The means of grace have little life or power in them. We are "shut up and cannot come forth." There is a weight upon the spirits, a burden upon the heart, gloom over the mind, and we can neither fly nor run in God's ways. But the margin reads, "O Lord, I am in distress." And this is often

the case with us. It is a part of the heart's bitterness, of which no one knows but the Lord. It arises sometimes from outward trouble — the many, the successive troubles which some of us have to pass through, deeply distress us. They are compared to fire and water, those opposite elements. But, blessed be the Lord, He has said, "Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine. When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior!"

Still they often distress us, especially when, like Peter, we take our eye off Jesus, and look at the rolling waves, or listen to the howling winds. A long succession of temporal trials, disappointments, vexations, and troubles, will make us cry, "O Lord, I am in distress!"

So, also, will a sense of guilt upon the conscience; for guilt always awakens fears, straitens the spirit, palsies the mind, bewilders the judgment, obscures the prospects, and dejects the soul. Oh, the distress which guilt produces if it is permitted to remain on the conscience, instead of being taken to the open fountain, the precious blood of Jesus, at once.

Unfitness for duty, and a fear of failure in our attempts to honor our Lord and Master — at times distress us. There is the duty before us, there is the precept requiring it of us, there is the desire in the heart to perform it; but, oh, how unfit to engage in it we feel! To will is present with us — but how to perform that which is good we find not. In a word, sometimes the state of the world so affects us, at others, the condition of the church so afflicts us, at others, the trials of the domestic circle so oppress us, at others, the temptations of Satan so harass us, and more frequently, perhaps, the inward conflict so exercises us — that we cry out in bitterness of soul, "O Lord, I am in distress!"

Every Christian of any standing in the church will be able to set his seal to this, for, more or less, we all know it to be true. All do not suffer alike — but all suffer. Some of us seem to have a double portion — but, no doubt, all is necessary, and by-and-bye we shall say, "He led us forth by the right way, that we might go to a city of habitation." But,

Secondly, let us join in his PRAYER. "O Lord, undertake for me." What a mercy to have a friend in need — a friend in trouble — a friend that is accessible, sympathizing, and able to help us. Such is our God. We may go to Him, we may lay our case before Him, we may fully plead with Him to undertake for us. Such a prayer indicates self-knowledge and self-renunciation. It is as if we said, "O Lord, I am so weak, so foolish, so fearful, so sinful — that I never can conquer my foes, master my difficulties, endure my trials, or patiently carry my cross of myself. Therefore, in Your great mercy, in Your tender love, according to Your most blessed Word — undertake for me!"

There are many things we need the Lord to undertake to do for us, and, blessed be His holy name, He has promised to do so. We need Him to undertake to teach us, that we may know His name, His truth, and His holy will — to deliver us from sin, Satan, self, and all the difficulties and dangers we meet with in our pilgrimage — to lead us in the right way, the way in which we shall honor His name, serve our generation, and acquire a good report — to strengthen us in all our tribulations, for all our duties, that we may conquer all our foes — to comfort us under all our sorrows, griefs, and woes — to work in us both to will and to do of His own good pleasure — and to perform in us

all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power.

Oh, that God would undertake to make us — all he requires us to be, and to supply us with all we may need, both for body and soul, for time and eternity!

Undertake to be a Father unto us, caring for us, protecting us, and daily communing with us. Undertake to be our Surety, discharging every debt, meeting every obligation, and delivering us from all legal responsibility. Undertake to be our Captain, equipping us for the fight, leading us against the foe, and giving us complete victory over every opponent. Undertake to be our Advocate, pleading for us in every court, and pleading in us against every adverse power. Well, Jesus is pledged to be all, and to do all this — for every one that believes on His name, walks with Him in fellowship, and labors in His cause. But our faith is so weak, our fears are so strong, our foes are so vigilant, and our hearts are so misgiving — that we doubt, disbelieve, and often fret. Let us, therefore, daily, yes, many times in the day, flee to the throne of grace, and in the prospect of all that tries our faith, alarms our minds, wakens our fears, or disturbs our peace, cry, "O Lord, undertake for me!

Undertake for me in prosperity — to save me from its snares!

Undertake for me in adversity — to preserve me from its temptations!

Undertake for me in health — to make me useful!

Undertake for me in sickness — to make me patient!

Undertake for me in life — to make me holy!

Undertake for me in death — to enable me to bear a testimony to Your faithfulness, veracity, and love!"

Reader, God does undertake for sinners — for sinners who believe in Jesus. He undertakes for all who honestly and heartily put themselves and their cause into His hands. Has He undertaken for you? Have you requested Him? Have you been driven by trouble, or drawn by love — to plead with Him to do so? All real Christians are brought to this. They all feel too weak, too foolish, too fearful — to accomplish the journey, run the race, conquer the foe, and arrive safe in Heaven of themselves; therefore they are all brought to cry right heartily and right earnestly, "O Lord, undertake for me!"

Tried Christian, this subject will just suit you; may the Lord make it a blessing to you. You often feel oppressed. You are bowed down greatly. You are in a great strait. You scarce know what to do, where to go, or to whom to look. You are encompassed with trouble. The waters come in unto you, even unto your soul. Go at such times to Jesus! Go as Hezekiah did. Go often until you obtain present relief, and the assurance of complete deliverance. Plead, plead as for your life, that the Lord would undertake for you. That He would undertake to BE all to you that you need — even a Savior, Friend, Husband, Deliverer, and Place of Defense to protect you. That He would undertake to DO all for you that is necessary — even to supply, direct, support, solace, and perfectly deliver you. That He would undertake WORK all in you that is required — washing you, sanctifying you, and conforming you to His own beautiful image; that you may have to say with the church, "Lord, You will ordain peace for us; for You also have wrought all our works in us." That He would

undertake to MAKE you just what you should be, and having done this, to keep you so.

Give no place to the foe that threatens, give no place to the fears that frighten, give no place to the unbelief that disheartens — but cry day and night to God, "Undertake for me!"

Believer, Jesus did undertake for you in the everlasting covenant; He is under engagements now, His promises are His bonds, He never forgets them nor can He be false to them. Therefore take courage, look to Him, trust in Him, converse with Him, expect from Him, and set your heart upon glorifying Him. Take His yoke upon you daily, undertake to do His will, to seek His honor, to promote His cause, to extend His kingdom — and He will undertake for you, to keep you as the apple of His eye, to feed you with the hidden manna, to strengthen you with strength in your soul, to make His way plain before your face — in a word, to guide you with His counsel, and afterwards receive you to glory!

26 The Antidote to Fear

The Antidote to Fear "Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?" Matthew 8:8

Timidity does not befit us — if Jesus is with us. As believers on His name — He has pledged Himself never to leave us or forsake us. He may be concealed by the mist, hidden behind the cloud, or lost sight of in the storm — but He is ever with us! The assurance of His presence — should generate confidence, courage, and daring. What have we to fear? Why should we fear? Can anything conquer Him? Can He forget or neglect us? Impossible! Well then may He ask, "Why are you fearful?" The CAUSE of our slavish fear is, that we look at CIRCUMSTANCES, and judge by them — rather than the Word of God. As if the Word must bend to circumstances, instead of circumstances conspiring to ratify and fulfill, the Word. The disciples listened to the howling of the winds, looked at the rolling billows, and thought of the feeble vessel — instead of remembering that Jesus was on board, and looking for safety to Him.

Or, we look at SELF — rather than Jesus. Every time we take the eye off Jesus, and fix it upon self, Satan gains advantage over us. If we would enjoy acceptance with God, and feel assured of His favor — the eye must be kept steadily fixed on Jesus, as our Sacrifice, Substitute, and Surety. We are complete in Him — but only in Him. We are accepted in Him — but only in Him.

Or, we look for PERFECTION where it is not to be found. We shall not find it in ourselves, nor in our fellow Christians. All are imperfect here, and the nearer we get to God, and the closer we walk with God — the more will our imperfections stare us in the face. If we would see perfection — we must look for it in Jesus. If we would enjoy perfection, we must realize our union and identity with Jesus.

If we look at circumstances instead of God's Word, or at self instead of Jesus, or for perfection anywhere but in Him — we shall become a prey to slavish fears, if not to despondency and despair! In addition to these things, Satan's influence and power often fills us with fear. He misrepresents the character of God. He perverts Scripture. He suggests evil thoughts. He stirs up our corruptions. He endeavors to conceal the Savior. He misapplies evidences. In a word, he is always endeavoring to puff us up with pride, harden us in presumption, or fill us with slavish fear. Our constitutional infirmities often have much to do with our fears. A natural timidity, or a weak and nervous system, often occasion many fears which are entirely groundless, and if nursed will become extremely painful! But all slavish fear is inconsistent in a Christian. The righteous should be as bold as a lion. Slavish fear dishonors God, who is love, who has promised — not only so, has sworn — that by two immutable things in which it is impossible for Him to lie, we might have strong consolation. Slavish fear robs Jesus of our confidence, on whom we should constantly depend, on whom at all times we should rely. He has given us every reason to trust Him and not be afraid.

Slavish fear contradicts the Inspired Word, for if the truth of that is admitted, and faith is steadily exercised on it, slavish fear is impossible.

Slavish fear grieves the Holy Spirit, who in the Christian is a Spirit of adoption. His work within us, and His Word without us, are alike calculated to inspire us with strong confidence, and to fill us with all joy and peace in believing. The loving Spirit desires to see us happy in God, obedient to God, as the effect of confidence in God; and is grieved when we give way to ungrounded and legal fears.

Slavish fear dejects and depresses the mind, unfitting it for duty, and disqualifying it for praising and serving God. It is a weapon which Satan uses against us with great effect, to our sorrow and injury, and therefore we are exhorted to resist him steadfast in the faith.

Slavish fear misrepresents religion, which in its nature is union to God, communion with God, and the resemblance of God, who is infinitely and eternally happy. Bible religion is happiness. Happiness flowing from pardon of sin, acceptance with God, union with Christ, deliverance from Hell, and the sure promise of eternal felicity. If slavish fear is so inconsistent and so injurious, surely we should realize it as an evil, and seek a remedy for it.

"Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?" The CURE for all slavish fear — is faith. Faith in God. Faith in Jesus. Faith in the promises and provision of God's gracious covenant and most holy Word. If we would be freed from these painful, troublesome, and injurious fears, we must steadfastly credit God's testimony. And this is the testimony "that He has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son." We must carry all to God's throne, and there spread it before our Heavenly Father, for His blessing or deliverance. We must cleave fast to Christ's person, who is our Guide, Guard, and immutable Savior. We must daily cast ourselves and our all — on God's mercy. This is the remedy — the only remedy. This will prove effectual — but all other remedies will be sure to fail. May the Holy Spirit help us to approve it, apply it, and realize deliverance from all our slavish fears by it.

Observe, so to fear, is quite natural, and all saints are more or less guilty of it, and therefore suffer for it. But though natural, it is nevertheless very injurious and sinful. Faith, and only faith as it credits God's testimony, carries all to God's throne, cleaves fast to Christ's person, and casts all on God's covenant mercy — can raise us above such fear. The indulgence of slavish fear, and the lack of a steady faith, are alike reprov'd by the Savior. He would have us trust ourselves and our all with Him. Believing His Word, confiding in His veracity, and rejoicing in His immutable faithfulness.

Believer, Jesus asks you, "Why are you fearful?" Why? Has He ever given you any cause? Can you derive any warrant for your fears from His holy Word, or His dealings with His people? Has He not been faithful? Is He not the same yesterday, today, and forever? Does He not forbid your agitation and vexation when He says, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God — believe also in me?" Is He not at this moment asking, "Where is your faith?" Ah! where is it? Not in exercise frequently — but like the root of the plant in winter, frozen in the cold ground!

Oh, Savior, increase our faith! Give us strong confidence in You, that we may not only commit all to You — but leave all with You, simply seeking "one thing" to reach the mark for the prize of our high calling. O to confide in Jesus, and so rise superior to our fears, doubts, and misgivings; and become like Abraham, who expected all God had promised, and stood prepared to part with all God had given, being "strong in faith, giving glory to God!" Lord, deliver us from our fears, and fill

us with faith, hope, and love, that we may glorify Your grace, and adorn our profession of Your truth.

27 Belief in Trouble

Belief in Trouble

"Cast your burden upon the Lord — and He shall sustain you! He will never allow the righteous to be moved!" Psalms 55:22 To be burdened at times, is the common lot of humanity. Every man has his own burden. But it is especially the case with the Lord's people. By faith in Jesus they are justified; His righteousness is placed to their account, and they are accepted as righteous before God. Provision is made both for their holiness and happiness — but they are often sorely burdened.

Sometimes worldly cares press heavily upon them,
bodily diseases weaken and pain them,
domestic trials wound and distress them,
church troubles, in some cases, lie like a millstone on their spirits,
and sin and sorrow are sure to be with them.

Every day brings its burden, and the lack of faith and fervent devotion adds to its weight. "While we live in these earthly bodies — we groan and are burdened!" A body of sin and death, apart from everything else, is enough to make us do so! But here is our relief — this is our comfort: the Lord is willing to bear our burdens for us! He will not prevent our being burdened — but we may take our burdens to His throne, and leave them there! Oh blessed privilege! My poor burdened brother or sister, God, your own God, bids you carry every burden to Him — and cast it upon Him. He does not wish to see you bowed down and sad. He would rather carry the load, than you should be cast down. He says, "Let your burden be what it may, let it be ever so heavy — cast it upon Me." So that now it becomes an act of obedience to do so. In fervent, oft-repeated prayer; by steady, persevering faith; in the exercise of a lively hope — cast every burden upon the Lord. Courage is required — display it. As fast as any burdens are laid on you — cast them upon your God. My poor widowed sister — it is your burden that He means.

Young man, weak believer — it is your burden too that is intended.

Aged Christian — the Lord specially points to you. He has carried many a burden for you, He will carry your present one. He will carry your last burden for you.

Minister of Jesus, your poor heart is sad, and your troubled soul is cast down and dejected; but Jesus, your Jesus, says, "Cast your burden upon Me!" You have often exhorted others to do so — do it yourself; do it, and peace shall flow into your agitated breast.

Burdened soul — every burdened soul who reads this page — you are intended, you are especially addressed. Yes, God intends you; try therefore to carry your burden to your Lord's throne — and leave it there. He will manage it for you, sanctify it to you, and overrule it for your

good.

What encouragement is here! "He will sustain you!" He will send you supplies — if you need them. He will grant you support — if your burden is to remain. He will work your deliverance — however difficult your circumstances may be.

"He will never allow the righteous to be moved." Clothed as he is, in the righteousness of Jesus; united as he is, to the person of God's Christ — he shall never be moved. Shaken, terrified, and perplexed — he may be. Tempted, tried, burdened, oppressed, and cast down — most probably he will be; but he shall never be moved. Faith, which has grasped the promise; faith which has embraced the Savior, shall maintain its hold. God will keep his feet, as it is written, "He will keep the feet of His saints."

Glory shall crown — what grace begins. The grace which first quickened the soul — will preserve it alive. The grace which enlightened — will sustain. The grace which justified — will glorify. Glory is the crown of grace, and the everlasting proof of the faithfulness of God.

He who casts his burden upon the Lord — he who proves himself to be righteous, by doing righteousness — "shall never be moved."

He shall never be moved from the cross — as the ground of his hope. Stripped of his own righteousness, emptied of carnal pride, he has fled to the cross for pardon and obtained peace. In the cross his faith centers; from the cross his hope springs; on the cross, for acceptance with God, he rests; and from that cross he shall never be moved. Error may spread. Satan may tempt. Men may try to mislead him. But, as constant as earth revolves round the sun, deriving its light and heat from it — so constant will such a man be in his dependance and reliance on the cross of Christ. He shall never be moved from the foundation which God has laid in Zion. On that foundation he builds for eternal life. On that foundation rests his everlasting all. To that foundation he is united. With that foundation he is one. The building and the foundation are not more one — than Christ and his soul are one.

Storms may beat. Winds may howl. Tempests may roar. Earth may quake. The very frame of nature may be dissolved. But he shall not be moved — for Christ and his soul are one. Oh, blessed fact! Oh, glorious truth! Never be moved from the foundation, let what will take place around him or be felt within him. He shall never be moved from the Savior in whom he trusts. No, never! He can say, "I know in whom I have believed." I know Him to be Divine, I know Him to be the only Savior. I know Him sufficiently to trust myself and my everlasting all in His hands. He will never fail. He cannot deceive me. What I have committed to Him is safe — and safe forever. Nothing can move him from Jesus. He cleaves to Him, and roots in Him, like the ivy in the wall; and may boldly ask, "What shall separate us from Christ?"

He shall never be moved from the throne at which he pleads. On that throne — his Father sits. Before that throne — his Savior intercedes. To that throne — he is invited to come boldly. At that throne — he found peace and obtained mercy, received grace, and felt a present Heaven. There he has already left many a burden. There his sighs — have been changed to songs. His darkness — has been turned to light. His Hell — has been turned to Heaven. Moved from that throne! Finally moved from it! Impossible, except it be to stand before the throne of glory! But the throne of grace where we worship now, like a beautiful dissolving view, will melt into the throne of glory

by-and-bye! The penitent pleader now, will be the praising and adoring worshiper then.

Oh, my friend, carry every burden to your God. Cast every burden on your Savior. He will not only carry your burdens for you — but He will carry you also, and will place you before His Father's face in glory forever! In all your darkness and doubt, in all your sickness and sorrow, in all your temptations and trials, under all your burdens and oppressions, listen, listen to your Lord's loving exhortation, and act upon it, "Cast your burden upon the Lord — and He shall sustain you! He will never allow the righteous to be moved!"

28 The Believer's Dignity

The Believer's Dignity

"Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God! Therefore the world knows us not, because it knew Him not." 1 John 3:1 The apostle, being about to exhort the Lord's people to love one another, lays the foundation of his exhortation on the great and glorious privileges which they enjoyed. He had spoken of their Advocate with the Father, of the unction they had received from the Holy One, of their union to Jesus — and now he refers to their high and holy relationship to God. He speaks in the language of holy wonder and admiring gratitude. He would have them fix their eye upon it, and fill their minds with the fact, that they were the children of God. Mark,

First, the DIGNITY conferred upon them. They were called the sons of God; and called sons, because they were so. This dignity was conferred on them as sinners, worthless sinners, who had no excellence in them, no good flowing from them; as despised sinners, generally treated with contempt and disdain. It was wholly of grace — of free grace. Not caused by anything in them, or occasioned by anything expected from them — but of grace, and grace alone. It was for the Lord's glory, the glory of his great name, the glory of his infinite grace. It was that they might have a Father — a Father in whom they could confide, whom they could love, whom to obey would be a pleasure.

Adam by sin forfeited his life, and his whole family became orphans. God, of his free love, adopts us into his family, reveals Himself as our Father, and constitutes us his sons. As God is their Father, Jesus becomes their Brother, their elder Brother. The Brother born for their adversity. The Brother with whom they can hold fellowship, and who will raise the whole family from death, degradation, and misery.

Heaven becomes then home. That Heaven where God resides in glory, unveils his face, and pours floods of happiness upon all the blessed inhabitants. O what dignity, to be the sons — not the slaves, not the servants, not merely the subjects — but the sons of God.

Secondly, the SOURCE from whence this dignity flows. His love. The Father's love. This love is FREE, not caused or called forth by anything in the creature — but flowing freely, spontaneously, out of the heart of God. He loves sinners, the vilest sinners — and loves them just because He pleases to love them. This love is FRUITFUL. Like the river Ezekiel saw flowing from under the threshold of the sanctuary, wherever it comes, it gives life, beauty, and glory. All our present comforts, spiritual blessings, and eternal prospects — flow from this free and sovereign love of God. When it is shed abroad in the heart, it is fruitful there, and all the graces of the Holy Spirit appear. Like the tree of life in the New Jerusalem, it stands on both sides of the river, yields a variety of fruits, producing new fruits continually, and its leaves are for the healing of the nations. This love is ETERNAL. In looking back, we can find no beginning; in looking forward, we can find no end. It is like the Divine Nature, "from everlasting to everlasting." It is the eternal God

manifesting himself as a loving God; and of mere love conferring the greatest, and best blessings upon poor sinners in time and eternity. He began to bless — because He would; he continues to bless — because he delights in doing so; and so he will go on blessing, forever and ever. Blessed be God, that he ever loved sinners, that he now loves sinners, that whom he once loves, he loves forever! Blessed be God, that he has constituted the sinners he has loved — his own sons; and that he will treat them as his beloved children forever!

Thirdly, the CONDITION of God's favored ones. The world knows us not. The world may know their persons, residences, and some of their peculiarities; but they do not know them as so privileged, dignified, and distinguished. Worldly people have no idea that they are God's chosen sons, His beloved children, the bride of His only-begotten Son. They do not know them, because they do not know God. They know not His nature, which is love; nor his method of acting, which is just contrary to what the flesh and carnal reason would suppose. If He chooses, he does not choose the rich, the noble, the learned, the prudent, or the great — but He chooses the foolish things of the world, the weak things, the base things, the despised things, things that are considered as not worth a thought, by the wise and prudent of the earth. Having therefore called such His sons, the world cannot know them, for if they were to look for God's children, they would look for a different class of people, in altogether different circumstances.

They do not know them, for they did not know Jesus, whom they resemble. He was poor — so are the most of them. He was despised — so are they. He was rejected by men — and so are they. They could not believe, that a lad living in a carpenter's cottage at Nazareth, working at the carpenter's trade, and calling the carpenter's wife mother, was the Son of God. Nor can they believe that these poor, illiterate, despised, praying people, are the sons of God. "The world knows us not."

Fourthly, the apostle calls us to BEHOLD. To behold the stupendous fact — that such sinners as we are, should be called the sons of God. To fix the eye on it, to fill the thoughts with it — until we wonder, admire, and praise God for his mercy. To behold also the manner in which God loves. His love is so great — as great as infinity, as vast as eternity. His love is so peculiar — loving the unlovely; loving them when He knew the worst of them; loving thorn when his foes, and adopting them to be His sons. His love is unparalleled — no love like God's love. No love so pure, so perfect, so productive. O to be led into his heights, depths, lengths, and breadths! O to know this love which passes knowledge more fully!

Reader, OBSERVE:

First, every believer, be his age, station, or circumstances whatever they may — is constituted, called, and treated as a son of God. However tried, troubled, or tempted; still, God dwells with him as a son.

Second, the privileges of the sons of God are wholly unmerited. They are not conferred on them for good done by them, or excellencies found in them, or works expected from them; but are the free gifts of the purest grace.

Third, their dignity is unknown at present, even as Christ's was. But though now unknown, they will be manifested by-and-by; for when Jesus comes, He says, "Then shall the righteous shine forth like the sun in the kingdom of their Father!" Now like the sun — they may be obscured by the

clouds of poverty, persecution, or distress; but then they will burst forth, and shine in all the beauties of holiness, in the splendor and glory of the sons of God. Now they are the Lord's hidden ones — but then they will be brought forth to the light, to behold His righteousness; and to shine to the praise of the glory of His grace forever and ever.

Let us then ascertain that we are numbered with them, that we are part of them, and then, however tried or troubled we may be, let us attend to the apostolic admonition for our comfort and God's honor, and with grateful hearts and admiring souls, "Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God."

But, if we are not sons of God! What a solemn supposition. If we are not sons of God — we are strangers to God; worse, we are enemies to God by wicked works. We are under His law. We are exposed to His wrath. But we are not entitled to the promises of His grace, nor may we hope to share in his glory. Our present condition is dangerous, for we are under condemnation; our future prospects are dreadful, for the sentence of condemnation must be executed — except we repent. Let us therefore examine into our state, and if there is a doubt about it, fly at once to Jesus, cast ourselves at His feet, appeal to His mercy, and persevere until He sends the Spirit of adoption into our hearts.

29 Jesus in His Garden

Jesus in His Garden

"My Beloved is gone down into His garden, to the beds of spices; to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies." Song of Solomon 6:2

Solomon's Song reveals the Lord Jesus Christ as the Beloved, and sets forth his love to his people, and his communion with them. To the truly spiritual mind, who has a knowledge of Eastern customs and manners, it is one of the most precious books in all the Scriptures; and we find that just in proportion to our spirituality — do we enter into and enjoy this inspired portion of Gods Word. From the power that has attended it, the sweetness found in it, and the effect produced on the affections by it — some of us have concluded that, if any book contains full and satisfactory internal evidence of divine inspiration — it is this. But the carnal man does not understand the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. And the carnal-minded believer has but little sympathy with the contents of this most blessed and precious portion of God's most holy Word. The Church had lost the presence of her Beloved, and she could find no substitute for Him; her restlessness awakens attention, and excites the inquiry, "What is your beloved more than another beloved?" She endeavors to describe Him — but fails; therefore she exclaims, "He is the chief among ten thousand! Yes, he is altogether lovely!" And adds, "This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem." This brings out the inquiry, "Where has your beloved gone, most beautiful of women? Which way did your beloved turn — that we may look for him with you?" Our text is her reply: "My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies."

Observe the Savior's TITLE, "My Beloved." Every believer loves Jesus, and loves him supremely. He is the Beloved, not a beloved. He stands above all others, and is loved above all others. Every believer loves Jesus sincerely, loves Him with the heart — with the whole heart. Every believer loves Him supremely — above and beyond all others. His language is, "Whom have I in Heaven but You; and there is none upon earth that I desire beside You!"

Believers love Jesus — because of his loveliness. When the Spirit reveals Him to them, He appears divinely sweet and glorious. All the glorious perfections of God, and all the amiable excellencies of man, are seen in Him; and the language of Watts is expressive of the view the soul has of Him —

"All over glorious is my Lord,

Must be beloved and yet adored.

His worth if all the nations knew;

Sure the whole earth would love Him too!"

Believers love Jesus — because He is worthy. Whatever can commend Him to the understanding, or endear Him to the affections — is found in Jesus. Many sigh and suffer from setting their affections upon an unworthy object — not so the believer. Jesus is worthy of our highest, holiest, and warmest love!

Believers love Jesus — because He is related to us. He is at once our Father, Brother, Friend, and Bridegroom. What would be monstrous in a natural sense — is right, lovely, prudent, and glorious, in a spiritual sense. We are espoused to Him, our affections are set upon Him, we long to see Him, and hope to spend an eternity with Him! What an eternity will that be! An eternity of love, holiness, happiness, and indescribable splendor!

"We love Him — because He first loved us." But for this, we would never have loved Him. Because He first loved us — He taught us our need of himself, revealed himself to us, shed abroad his love in our hearts — and thus won our affections for himself. Oh, to love Jesus more! To love Him right heartily, and to love Him without one moment's intermission!

"None among the sons of men,
None among the Heavenly train,
Can with Jesus Christ compare;
None so sweet, and none so fair!"

Notice the Savior's RESORT: "He is gone down into his garden." His paradise is above — but He has a garden below. This garden is his church — the whole body of his elect, who believe in his adorable name. These are separated from the world — by an act of sovereign grace, and the exercise of omnipotent power. They are enclosed — by his promises, providence, and presence. For He is a wall of fire round around them, and the glory in the midst of them. They are cultivated by his ministers, Word, and Spirit — that they may blossom for his delight, and bring forth fruit for his glory.

They are beautiful in his eyes. Nothing so beautiful. Hence He exclaims, "You are beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah; as lovely as Jerusalem. Turn away your eyes from me — for they have overcome me. You have ravished my heart — my sister, my spouse!" What language for Jesus to use toward such worms as we are. It is this that stumbles the carnal — for they cannot understand it. But it fills the bride of Christ with admiration and grateful love. Here are the heights, the depths, the lengths, and the breadths of the love of Christ, which passes knowledge. As separated for Him, enclosed and cultivated by Him — they are not only beautiful — but fruitful; they bring forth fruit to his Father's glory, and to His own satisfaction and delight. The church is the Lord's garden — a garden . . .

purchased with his precious blood,
planted by his skillful hand, and

valued by Him more than all the world! This is the treasure He found hid in the field of this world, which He hid, went and sold all that He had, and purchased the field. Now He claims the world as his own; but his church is "his peculiar treasure."

He comes down into his garden, which is at present low in a low place. His coming down into his garden — indicates her condition and His condescension. He visits his poor, despised, and persecuted people. He visits them not merely from pity — but love. He is always with them — but in a special manner when they appear as a garden.

"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I." "He is gone down to the beds of spices." To meet with the little companies of believers, which He compares to spice-beds. Every Christian is a spice-plant, and these spice-plants grow in beds. The world sees not their beauty — for it is spiritually discerned. The world smells not their fragrance — for it is spiritually inhaled.

These plants are rare — none has them but Jesus; nowhere can they be found but in his church. They are fragrant — and their perfume is drawn forth by Jesus, as the Sun of Righteousness, and wafted upward by the Spirit's influence, as the south wind. To Jesus, there is fragrance in the persons, graces, services, and sacrifices of his people; especially in their prayers and praises.

"The prayers and praises of the saints,

Like precious odors sweet,

Ascend and spread a rich perfume

Around the mercy-seat. When God inclines the heart to pray,

He has an ear to hear;

To Him there's music in a groan,

And beauty in a tear."

Mark the Savior's OBJECT. "To feed in the gardens." To feed, delight, and find satisfaction in his people. Never did mother delight herself in her first-born child — as Jesus delights himself in his people. Never did gardener delight himself in his rare, costly, and excellent plants — as Jesus does in his people. Hence He speaks of them and calls them, "The excellent of the earth — in whom is all my delight." And He speaks to them and says, "You shall be called, Hephzibah — my delight is in her." But He comes not only to refresh, satisfy, and delight himself — but to feed them. This He does with his Word, his ordinances, the operations of his Holy Spirit, and the manifestation of himself. Oh, how it refreshes, revives, satisfies, and delights the soul — when Jesus walks in his garden, among the beds of spices; or, without the figure, when He manifests himself unto us as He does not unto the world.

He not only comes to feed — but "to gather lilies." Another figure to represent his saints. Every saint is a lily — not a nettle, or a thorn, or a poisonous weed. Oh, no; but a beautiful, fragrant, useful, ornamental lily. They may be lilies among thorns sometimes, that is, when in the world; but they are arranged and beautiful when in the church. Jesus plants, waters, watches, enjoys, and preserves his lilies — and in his own time comes to gather them. He will allow no one to gather his lilies, but himself.

He has the keys of death and hades. He opens — and no man shuts. He shuts — and no man opens. He comes and severs soul from body, removes his lily plant out of the reach of frosts, nipping winds, and the crude hands of man. He places it in his bosom, presents it to his Father —

and preserves it in blossom and beauty before his throne forever! How gently He gathers them oftentimes. How wisely He removes them, before the storm descends. How carefully He takes them to his Father's house. Of many it may be said, as it was written of one —

"Dismissed to glory — with a kiss of love,
He bade the lagging moments swifter roll;
Death was to him as harmless as a dove,
While floods of glory overwhelmed his soul. Not plucked but gathered by the hand of love,
As tender fruit or fragrant lilies are;
Transplanted to the paradise above,
To blossom in eternal glory there!"

Sometimes Jesus comes into his garden specially to plant — this is what his church needs now. Oh, Savior, come and plant Your garden with many fruit-bearing trees, who shall bring forth the fruits of righteousness, to the praise and glory of God! Come and plant in Your spice-beds, many rows of young spice-plants — take them from our congregations, from our Sunday schools, from our families, and from our neighborhoods, and let the whole earth be perfumed with their fragrance!

Sometimes Jesus comes to prune and water. Oh! how much pruning we need, and how sharp the pruning knife He finds it necessary to employ! How often we need watering by his hand — how dry our soil, and how withered our appearance! Oh, Savior! You have said of your garden, "I, the Lord, watch over it; I water it continually. I guard it day and night so that no one may harm it!" O Lord, water my soul. Water the souls of your people abundantly, that they may revive as the grain, grow as the vine, and spread forth their roots and branched as the cedars. May we, from sweet experience and inward evidence of its truth, often sing —

"Each moment watered by Your care,
And fenced with power divine;
Fruit to eternal life shall bear,
The feeblest plant of Thine."

Sometimes Jesus comes to gather and take his people home to his Father. He has said, "I will come and receive you to myself — that where I am, there you may be also." Though spoken of his second advent, it is true of his removing us by death. He comes for us, He wisely gathers us, He safely transports us to a milder and healthier climate.

O my soul, Jesus is daily coming down into his garden to gather his lilies; He will soon come and gather you — are you ready? Oh, to be full of fragrance, that the sick-room may be filled with the fragrance! Jesus! Savior! kindly preserve and supply me now, and gently gather me with your own loving hand at last, to the praise of your glory!

"My best Beloved keeps his throne,

On hills of light in worlds unknown;
But He descends and shows his face,
In the young gardens of his grace.
"In vineyards planted by his hand,
Where fruitful trees in order stand,
He feeds among the spicy beds,
Where lilies show their spotless heads.
"Oh, may my spirit daily rise,
On wings of faith above the skies,
Until death shall make my last remove,
To dwell forever with my love."

30 The Design of Christ's Coming

The Design of Christ's Coming

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance: 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners'—and I am the worst of them all!" 1 Timothy 1:15 No theme is like the love of Jesus. No manifestation of that love, is like His coming into our world to save sinners. O that we could think, speak, and write worthy of that glorious subject! But it would require more than human abilities, and a longer space than time. This makes the thought of eternity sweet — in which we shall have space, opportunity, inclination, and all kinds of help — to prosecute this delightful subject! Yes, eternity will be spent in thinking, speaking, enjoying, and celebrating the love of Jesus. O that my heart was filled and fired with it now! O that I could so write as to influence, inflame, and fill every reader's heart with the love of Christ! Precious theme! Holy Spirit help our meditations upon it! But our principal object now is, to dwell on the design of the Savior, He came into the world to save sinners.

First, here is a great and GLORIOUS OBJECT: The salvation of sinners. From WHAT does He save them? From an eternal Hell, and from sin — the cause of Hell.

Hell! What a fearful place is Hell! The prison where God's enemies are confined! The torture room, where guilty rebels are eternally tormented!

Every terrible figure is employed to represent it. It is . . .

a lake of fire;

blackness, darkness, and tempest;

outer darkness;

weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth;

an abyss of tormenting flame!

There will be no jail delivery there. There will be no mitigation of torment there. All will be dreadful — eternally dreadful. Jesus came to save sinners from going to Hell.

Sin is the cause of Hell. Hell is but the natural effect of sin. There could be no saving from Hell — but by saving from sin. Jesus came therefore to save sinners from sin. To save them from its guilt — by shedding His blood for them; and to save them from its love and power — by procuring the Holy Spirit, and giving that Spirit to them. But WHOM did He come to save? Sinners! Those who were only sinners — altogether sinners. Those who could show no reason why they should be saved. Those who would never seek to be saved by Him — unless He induced and inclined them. Those from whom He could expect nothing in return, and from whom He will get nothing but thanks, and even this will be the fruit of His own grace.

HOW did He propose to save them? Consistently with God's government on the one hand, and their own nature on the other. So that God's government should not be wronged, nor man's nature forced. How wonderful is this! God's law and government gets all that it requires — and poor sinners are induced to accept a free, full, and everlasting salvation. He came to save sinners, and depend upon it — He will save all His people from their sins!

Secondly, The influence which this subject exerted in HEAVEN. It influenced the whole Godhead. Father, Son, and Spirit were affected by it. Nothing lay nearer the heart of God, than this. Nothing reveals so much of God, as this. It so influenced God, that a council was held in Heaven — a covenant of grace was entered into:

the plan of salvation was drawn;

provision for salvation was made;

the promise of salvation was given; and

at length the period of the salvation arrived, when Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, came into the world to save sinners.

He came freely. He took our nature willingly. He appeared in our place cheerfully. He undertook to answer for us legally. He wrought, He taught, He suffered — in order that sinners may be saved — freely, cheerfully, certainly, eternally. He undertook to be a Savior. He bore the name of a Savior — Jesus. He did the work of a Savior. He shall enjoy the glory and honor of a Savior. The Father ordained Him to save. He cheerfully came to save. The Spirit reveals His person, sprinkles His blood, applies His Word, and puts His people into possession of salvation. Thus salvation had, and has, an influence upon the whole Godhead.

Thirdly, the influence this subject has in HELL. Every fallen spirit is affected by it. The prince of darkness and all his demons are roused up, determined to oppose, hinder, and if possible, prevent it. Hence they act upon the saints and lull many of them to sleep. He produces disagreements, that they may not go forth united and energetic to the field; and fills others with self-satisfaction, so that they are satisfied, if not pleased, with themselves, when they are doing little or nothing for God's glory, or to pluck sinners as brands from the burning.

They act particularly upon preachers, so that some fall into errors, others into sin, and many become wearisome, sleepy, and indifferent. Nor do they overlook writers, especially those who write for the press — hence the multitude of erroneous, profane, and pestiferous publications!

Especially do they act upon sinners — hence the carelessness, blindness, and forgetfulness they manifest. Therefore the Apostle said, "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

Fourthly, the influence this subject should have on EARTH. Their influence on ministers — inflaming them with zeal, self-denial, and soul consuming earnestness, in endeavoring to bring souls to Jesus. Their influence on deacons — stimulating them to remove all obstacles out of the preachers way, providing all possible accommodation for hearers, and rendering pastors all the assistance they possibly can. Their influence on all Christians — stirring them up to seek the

present, the immediate salvation of all around. Travailing in birth for sinners, until Christ is formed in them. Especially guarding against everything unlovely in temper, disposition, and conduct — lest they should hinder the gospel of Christ. Employing all likely means to bring sinners under the Word, or lead them directly to the Savior. Engaging each, and all, personally to aim at, and strive to save some. When our own salvation is secured — the salvation of all around us to the glory of God, should be the all-absorbing object and subject, which engrosses our attention. Did Jesus come to save sinners? So should we go directly to sinners, and be ever willing to give, to do, and even to suffer, for the conversion and salvation of sinners. Is the great doctrine, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, worthy of all acceptance? Then let us accept it for ourselves, let us convey it to others, and endeavor to urge it upon their attention in the manner most likely to succeed. Let us use the tongue, the pen, and the press for this purpose. Let us work publicly and privately with this end in view. Does this great subject influence God Himself? Then let us seek to be like-minded with God — with the Father who sent His Son — with the Son who came to suffer, bleed and die — with the Holy Spirit, who wrought in Christ, and still even works for Christ.

Let us be like-minded with Paul, who could say of Jesus, "We proclaim Him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me." The word "labor," signifies to labor even to weariness. May we so labor, not for a day, a month, or a year; but every day, every month, every year, until our Lord calls us home; and may this be our subject and our theme, wherever we go, and with whoever we converse,

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance: 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners' — and I am the worst of them all!"

31 Present Privileges and Future Prospects

Present Privileges and Future Prospects

"Beloved, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is!" 1 John 3:2

1. Our present privileges. To be the object of another's love, is one of the greatest privileges we can enjoy; especially if he who loves us is great, good, or glorious. Now it is the privilege of every believer to be beloved of God. Father, Son, and Spirit, love him; did love him from all eternity, do love him through all time, will love him when time shall be no more. What a thought — The infinite and eternal God loves me! Loves me infinitely. Loves me as He loves Jesus, his only-begotten Son. O Holy Spirit, unfold this love to me, shed it abroad in my heart, and make it a feast of fat things unto my soul! But the believer is not only beloved of God, he is beloved of all that are godlike. The apostle calls all the saints beloved. He loves them all, and he exhorts each to love the whole, and the whole to love each other. If I am a saint, every saint who knows me will love me; and love me just in proportion as he drinks into the mind of God, and I resemble Jesus. The believer may say, "Every saint in Heaven loves me, and will one day show that love to me; every saint on earth has in his heart the principle of love to me, which only needs to be called out by circumstances, or his knowledge of me."

"Now we are the children of God." We adopted into His family, regenerated by his Spirit, acknowledged at his throne. Adoption is an act of grace without us; regeneration is a work of grace within us.

Adoption was purposed in eternity — but revealed in time, and will be fully manifested when time shall be no more.

Regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit, quickening us from a death in sin, and conveying a divine nature to our souls. So that being adopted into God's family, we receive the nature and spirit of His children, whereby we learn to know, love, confide in, and obey our Father.

Acknowledgment, is at the throne of grace, where our God receives our petitions, accepts our persons, imparts the Spirit of adoption, and owns us as his. When born again, the desire to be the Lord's, springs up; this desire is expressed in prayer; the prayer is accepted and approved of God; and by his Word and Spirit, he assures us of his love, and our filial relationship to Him. O blessed privilege, to be the child, the son of God, to be enabled to call God my Father, and to be acknowledged by Him at his throne when I do so!

"NOW are we the children of God." Yes, now, while we are so poor, so sinful, so despised, so persecuted, so tempted. Now, while the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, so that we cannot do the things that we would. Now, while we find a law in our members, warring against the law of our minds; and at times bringing us into subjection to the law of sin that is in our members. Now, while fears harass us, doubts torment us, Providence tries us, Satan

worries us — and we are ready to exclaim, "All these things are against me!"

Tried believer, your trials, your troubles, your darkness, your doubts, your fears, your misgivings — do not affect your sonship! You are now the child of God, though under discipline and training, being prepared perhaps for usefulness on earth, certainly for glory in the presence of your Father and your God. Every believer, whatever may be the state of his mind, or his outward circumstances — is now a child of God; for we "are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus," Galatians 3:26. Such are our present privileges; but the apostle sets before us, also,

2. Our future prospects. These are partly known and partly unknown. "What we will be — has not yet been made known." We cannot fathom the greatness of the glory that shall be put upon us; we only know that the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. We are now like the sun behind the cloud, obscured or concealed; but the cloud will be dispersed, and we shall shine forth in power, beauty, and splendor, of which at present we have no conception! There is a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, in reserve for us! We cannot fathom the glorious use that will be made of us; we only know that Jesus will come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all those who believe; and that we shall serve God day and night in his Heavenly temple. But as to the exact nature of our employments, or the glory that God will get by us in the future state — we cannot imagine at present. We cannot fathom the profound joys that will be imparted to us, when we shall drink of the river of His pleasures. There will be a depth, a purity, a power in those joys, such as we have no adequate idea of at present. The glory we shall wear will be so great, the employment in which we shall serve will be so spiritual, and the joys we shall realize will be so profound — that we know not what we shall be. But we do know, that Jesus will come again. He will appear for us, and appear to us; as He said, He will come and receive us unto Himself. We shall then see Him in all His glory, in His Father's glory, with all the holy angels with Him! Not only so — but "when Christ who is our life shall appear — then shall we also appear with Him in glory!" Seeing Him as He is — we shall be made like Him. Spiritual views of Jesus are always transforming. We shall be like Him in the holiness of His nature — all sins, all corruption, all defilement, will be separated from us. We shall be like Him in the happiness He enjoys, perfectly and perpetually satisfied. We shall be like Him in the glory that He wears, for He has given this glory to us, and will put it upon us; as He said to His Father, "The glory that You gave Me, I have given them, that they may be one as we are." As the Head is — the members will be; pure, peaceful, and perfect. As the Bridegroom is — the bride will be; all glorious within, and magnificent without.

Now, the desire for it — is begotten in our hearts by the Holy Spirit; the promise of it — is given to us in His holy Word; and we possess the pledge of it in our hearts, by the indwelling of the Comforter; for He is the pledge of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession, to God's glorious praise. Are such our privileges now? and are such our prospects in future? then let us,

Live hopefully, as Paul lived; even "in hope of eternal life", which God who cannot lie, promised before the world began." This hope will save us from much gloom, from slavish fear, and from black despair; therefore let us live expecting the hope that is laid up for us in Heaven, of which we have heard in the Word of the truth of the gospel.

Let us walk wisely. Wisely toward them that are without, even when they hate, despise, and persecute us. They know us not. They cannot sympathize with us — but they may be won by us.

Let us walk worthily, or befitting the dignity put upon us, and the glory anticipated by us; even as the apostle exhorts, "Walk worthy of God, who has called you to His kingdom and glory;" or His glorious kingdom.

Let us work assiduously. Jesus says, "Son, go work today." Only today, during our brief stay here, our short life. The night comes, and the glorious morning of that never-ending day, when our "sun shall no more go down, neither shall our moon withdraw itself; for the Lord shall be our everlasting light, and the days of our mourning shall be ended." Now we may work for Jesus — who labored and suffered for us. Now we may work for God — who of His own good pleasure has given us the kingdom us. Now we may work for saints — who are to share with us in the eternal inheritance us. Now we may work for sinners — who, through our instrumentality, may be warned of danger, won to God, and be made fit also to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.

Brethren, "let us not sleep as do others — but let us watch and be sober;" and seeing we "look for such things, let us be diligent, that we may be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless." O glorious, animating, consecrating thought — we shall be like Jesus, for we shall see Him as He is, and be forever with Him! Holy Spirit, keep this glorious prospect daily before our minds, to stimulate, preserve, and consecrate us!

32 A Purifying Hope

A Purifying Hope "And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself — just as He is pure." 1 John 3:3

HOPE is made up of desire and expectation. We may desire what we do not expect — but we never expect what we do not desire. I desire something good: the gospel reveals it; God promises it; I believe the promise; therefore, I expect it. Thus, hope is the offspring of faith.

I cannot expect what I do not believe to exist, or what there is no possibility of obtaining; but if I believe in the existence of a future good, and perceive that it is attainable, I take the way pointed out, expecting to enjoy it. No faith — no hope. Strong faith — vigorous hope; for our hope is always as our faith is. This is the effect of adoption. It is the expectation of a child. We perceive that God is our Father, that as such He loves us, delights to bless us, and is willing to confer all good things upon us; therefore, we expect good and great things from Him. It is an expectation of seeing Jesus as He is, in all His glory; of being like Him in holiness, happiness, and spirituality; and being forever with Him in peace, activity, and satisfaction. This principle is called "A lively hope," by the apostle; it is operative, therefore we are said to be "saved by hope;" it abides with us all through our wilderness journeys, and never leaves us, until it is lost in the full blaze of everlasting glory. A good hope purifies the heart. There is a purification which only the blood of Christ could effect; and there is a purification, which is exclusively the work of the Holy Spirit — but here the child of God is said to purify himself. He knows he must be holy. He longs to be holy. He prays to be made holy. He strives to be holy. The hope of seeing Jesus, being with Him, and like Him — stirs him up to purify himself, especially from selfishness. He sees that selfishness is directly opposed to God's glory, the Savior's honor, the Spirit's work, the good of society, and his own well-being; therefore he endeavors to detect it, he mourns over it, he seeks the pardon of it, and endeavors to conquer it. He wishes to live for God, to live to Jesus, to benefit His generation. Instead of making self his great object and end — he desires to love God supremely, and his neighbor as himself.

He endeavors to purify himself from worldly lusts — as the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life; and to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts.

He endeavors to purify himself from erroneous notions — he brings his creed to God's Word to correct it, to perfect it, to give up whatever is contrary to the inspired volume; and to add to it whatever has been omitted, which is recorded there.

He endeavors to purify himself from mental filthiness — the heart pours out floods of filthiness into the imagination, which the carnal man relishes and indulges — but the believer loathes it, hates himself for it, and seeks to be freed from it. As one possessed of great and glorious privileges, of exceeding great and precious promises — he endeavors to carry out the apostle's admonition, "Having therefore, dearly beloved, these promises — let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord."

He endeavors to purify himself from whatever is impure or unholy, for the prayer of the apostle for the Thessalonians carries his heart with it to Heaven as he utters it, "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." His heart is set upon perfect holiness, and just in proportion as he is under the influence of a lively hope — he labors to purify himself even as Christ is pure. This hope purifies — by raising the mind from carnal — to spiritual things; from earthly — to Heavenly joys. This hope purifies — by fixing the eye on the holy, harmless, and undefiled Jesus; on a holy Heaven, and a holy God. This hope purifies — by attaching the affections to things which are above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God. By nature the affections are detached from the divine, and attached to the carnal and depraved. But grace produces a separation, proclaims a divorce, and brings them back to their proper and legitimate objects. This hope purifies — by awakening the conscience — making and keeping it tender. The conscience of the sinner slumbers or sleeps soundly — so that it regards not the voice of God's law, the calls of Christ's gospel, nor the intimations of a wise and holy Providence. But grace arouses it, gives it sensibility — and it becomes a judge, reprove, and guard. This hope purifies — by using the Word and blood of Jesus. Which Word detects, directs, and encourages; while the blood purges away guilt, slavish fear, and dreary gloom. The Word feeds hope — and the blood of Jesus encourages it in all its actings. This hope purifies — by crucifying the old man, and mortifying the deeds of the body, instead of indulging its passions, or being led by its propensities. So that with . . .

the mind elevated from earth to Heaven,

the eye fixed on Jesus,

the affections set on things above,

the conscience kept wakeful and tender,

the Word and blood of Jesus being in constant use,

the old man being crucified, and

our members which are earthly being mortified

— the work of purification goes on, our adoption is proved, the nature of our hope is manifested, and our title to everlasting life becomes indisputable. The MODEL after which the hopeful believer works, is Jesus — "even as He is pure." Jesus is presented as . . .

our pattern which we are to copy,

our example which we are to imitate,

our copy after which we are to write, and

the standard which we are to endeavor to reach. No believer can look at the life of Jesus — without approving that life in his judgment. Nor can he be under the influence of grace — without admiring that life, and desiring to be conformed to it.

He would never ask, "What do others do?" But he asks himself, "What would Jesus do? How would Jesus act in this case? What would Jesus say under such circumstances?" And then he

earnestly desires, heartily prays, and energetically endeavors to do — as he believes Jesus would do. This course corrects many evils, prevents many failures, stimulates him constantly to deny himself, and raises him to a pitch of purity and spirituality, which he would not otherwise attain.

Beloved reader, have you this hope? Do you live expecting Jesus to appear, to see Him, be made like Him, and be forever with Him? If so, what is your daily desire and business? Are you panting for holiness? Are you "diligent that you may be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless?" Are your loins girt, your lamps burning, your garments white, and you yourself like a servant watching for his Lord's coming?

What is your model, or pattern? Is it Jesus? His holy life, His blameless conduct, His gracious conversation, His habitual aim to glorify His Father? Are you purifying yourself in the fountain of His blood, in the laver of His Word, and by separation from ungodly people, principles, and practices? Could it be said of you with truth, as of saints in Peter's day, "You have purified your souls, in obeying the truth through the Spirit, unto sincere love of the brethren." Or would the language of James be more applicable to you, "Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded!" A faith that does not work by love — is spurious! A hope that does not purify the heart — is carnal! A religion that does not make us holy — is a delusion!

Holiness, or likeness to Jesus, is the end God has in view in all He has done, or is doing for His people; and if we are not holy, we have not the Spirit of Christ, and are therefore do not belong to Him.

33 The Blessed Man

The Blessed Man

"He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, which brings forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper." Psalms 1:3 The Book of Psalms exhibits true Christian experience under all its varieties. Here we may learn how Jesus felt, soliloquized, suffered, and rejoiced. The heart of the Son of Man is laid open. The varied experience of the "Man of Sorrows" is made known. Here also we have the experience of the believer under the Law — and in the enjoyment of the Gospel; under persecution — and in prosperity; in possession of ordinances — and deprived of them; in darkness — and in light; in strong confidence — and in doubt and fear.

We naturally turn to the Book of Psalms in dark and dreary days, because we always find a companion, and trace the footsteps of the flock; so also in joy and gladness, for no language will express our gratitude and praise, like the language we find in this book. This psalm describes man under God's blessing — and contrasts him with man under God's curse. Or, the saint walking consistently — and the sinner following the devices and desires of his own heart. We look, First, at the CHARACTER, as described by the exercise of his affections, and the course of his life.

1. In the exercise of the affections. He is one who loves God's Word, he delights in it. To him it is a prize, a privilege, a paradise.

He loves God's Word, and therefore must possess it. "My own Bible!" What a mercy to hold God's Word in one's hand, and be able to say this!

He loves it so as to peruse it. He may read other books; he must read this. He may read portions of another work; he must read the whole of this. It is to him among books, as Goliath's sword was to David among weapons of war, who said, "There is none like it — give me that!"

He so loves it as to study it, and meditate upon it. Study is the exercise of the intellect, by which he seeks to know the meaning of the various words, sentences, and paragraphs; this is often like the winter's light, clear but cold; useful — but not sufficient. Meditation is the exercise of the affections. It is spiritual mastication; and as frequent and thorough mastication of our natural food, is necessary to the health of the body; so is frequent and earnest meditation necessary to the health of the soul. David could meditate in it day and night. Meditation feeds the soul, directs the affections, animates the spirit, and causes us to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

2. In the course of his life — he forsakes God's foes, and keeps clear of their snares. He proves the truth of Solomon's proverb: "He who walks with wise men will be wise — but the companion of fools shall be destroyed." He will not stand with the idle, or in the way of the profane. They may lose time, and peril eternity — but he will not. But, like Jesus, he must be about his Father's business, and can say, "I must work the works of Him who sent me "into the world, redeemed me

from among men, and called me by his grace, "while it is day; for the night comes, in which no man can work."

He will not walk with them sociably, or as a friend. He will do them good if he can; he must transact business with them — but he soon wearies of their company, and perhaps exclaims, "Gather not my soul with sinners;" and acts upon the divine command, "Come out from among them, and be separate." He will not sit with them as comfortable. He is not, cannot be, at home, in their society. He is a stranger with them, and a sojourner, as all his fathers were. He will stand with the upright, walk with the spiritual, and sit with the godly; but not with the profane, the carnal, and the depraved.

Secondly, his SITUATION. He is "like a tree planted by the rivers of water."

"Planted." This is the act of another. True religion is the work of God. He separates from the wild olive tree, and grafts into the good olive tree. He plucks us up out of nature's soil — and plants us in the soil of grace. Hence believers are called, "Trees of righteousness, the right-hand planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified." When God plants — none can root up; but when others plant — God will surely uproot. Hence Jesus said, "Every plant that my Heavenly Father has not planted — shall be rooted up." Being planted, he becomes rooted. False professors have no root in themselves, and in time of temptation they fall away. Paul speaks of believers, as rooted in Christ — rooted and built up in Him — as rooted and grounded in love. What a mercy to have the rooted in Jesus! We may have most painful infirmities, numerous imperfections, and a thousand causes for humiliation; but if we are rooted in Jesus, if we can say, "The root of the matter is found in me," all will be well at last. Being rooted, we have this advantage, abundant resources, "rivers of water." We have the means of grace, these are blessed; but we have the Spirit of grace, this is far more blessed. The means are like the flowery banks within which the waters flow, by which the waters are often guided; but the Spirit is the living water that flows through these. The banks, however excellent the soil, or well constructed, will not impart life, or make fruitful; the waters only can do this. Just so, the means, however scriptural and beautiful, will not satisfy the longing soul, or replenish the sorrowful soul; the Holy Spirit alone will do this. Blessed Spirit, so free, so abundant, so suitable are His gracious communications, that they may well be represented by "rivers of water;" and as enjoyed in this world, "rivers of water in a dry place."

Thirdly, the EFFECTS. Rich FRUIT, the fruits of the Spirit, "love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance."

Fruits IN SEASON; the active graces in prosperity; the passive graces in adversity. Fruits suited to health and sickness, poverty and plenty, peace and persecution, life and death. An ever-green profession. "His leaf also shall not wither." He is ever beautiful, ornamental, and useful. How many professors have we seen wither! They were not planted by the waters. They were not secretly and regularly supplied with communications of peace by the Spirit. They looked beautiful for a time — but, alas! they soon faded, withered, and died!

General prosperity. "Whatever he does — it shall prosper." Not every temporal thing, though this was very much the case, under the former dispensation, and is, up to a certain point, now. But in spirituals we may carry out the words to their utmost latitude; for Jesus has said, "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you." Mark

the twofold abiding! We must abide in Jesus; no rambling, roving, or backsliding. His Words must abide in us — remembered, believed, pleaded. Then we may "expect whatever we ask." Or, whatever we do, shall prosper. Do we pray? we prosper. Do we fight? we prosper. Do we sow? we prosper. We obtain blessings, conquer our foes, and at the great harvest we "shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing our sheaves with us."

See, beloved, who are God's favorites: such as avoid sin, are distinct from sinners, and commune much with Himself, through His own holy and most blessed Word.

See the effects of God's blessing. When God blesses us — we are like a tree in a good soil, well watered — we are green, graceful, and fruitful; benefitting and blessing all about us.

See the proof that we enjoy our privileges. Not holy talk merely — but a holy walk. Not a mere profession — but a scriptural, ornamental, and useful profession.

See also, the fearful state of many professors. Are they like trees planted by rivers of waters? Alas, no! Do they bring forth fruit in season? Alas, no! See them in health — how vain, worldly, frivolous, and mirthful! See them in sickness — how fretful, impatient, and ready to complain! See them — but let each of us look at ourselves, into ourselves, and, O may we find evidence that we are the blessed of the Lord, who made Heaven and earth!

Reader, what are you? A Christian, in union with Christ, rooted in him, built up in him, deriving your supplies and stability from him? Or, Are you a mere worldly character, without Christ, a stranger to communion and fellowship with Christ? No questions can be more important, for you are either the blessed of the Lord Almighty; or you are under His curse, and exposed to his wrath. Trifle not with a matter so solemn. Delay not to examine into a subject so important. It is for eternity, and eternity stamps the greatest importance on everything connected with it. O if you should be found among those of whom Jesus said, "Bind them in bundles, and burn them! "Rather, may He say, "Gather the wheat into My barn!"

34 Behold the Man!

Behold the Man!

"Behold the Man!" John 19:5 The dispensations of Divine Providence, bring out and manifest the nature and disposition of man. But no providence ever did this, like the coming of the Son of God into our world. In His whole life He was holy, harmless, undefiled, full of mercy, clothed with power, and went about doing good. Yet, because He sympathized with God, condemned sin, and required submission to God's righteousness — He was hated, persecuted, and put to death! His judge asked, "What evil has He done?" No reply could be given — but they still clamored for His crucifixion. Hatred to God, and hatred to holiness — lies embedded in the human heart, and under these circumstances — it is clearly brought out. They have scourged Him, crowned Him with thorns, clothed Him with an old purple robe, smitten Him with their hands, and now Pilate brings Him forth, saying, "Behold the Man!" The object to which our attention is directed, is a MAN. But such a Man as was never seen before. This Man was Jehovah's fellow, or equal. Hence the prophet, speaking as God's mouth, and referring to this very time cries, "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man that is my fellow, says the Lord Almighty." In Him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. That body is the shrine, the temple of Deity. His heart was the throne of Jehovah. It was God manifest in human flesh! He was naturally equal with God — but He voluntarily became our substitute, that He may be our Savior.

He became a man — for us.

He was made under the law — for us.

He kept all the precepts of the law — for us.

He paid the dreadful penalty of the law — for us.

All He did, and all He suffered was — for us; and as our substitute.

Having done and suffered all that the law and justice of God required — He is our Savior: able to save all who come unto God by Him, and determined to save all who put their trust in Him.

He is presented to us in the gospel narrative — as rejected, forsaken, and punished. He was presented to Caiaphas the high-priest, who represented the Jews, and he rejected Him. He was presented to Pilate, the Roman judge, who represented the Gentiles, and He rejected Him. He is therefore, "despised and rejected of men." All His disciples forsook Him and fled. And "it pleased the Lord to bruise Him, He has put Him to grief." What a spectacle! Rejected by men, forsaken by all of His friends, and punished as the substitute of sinners, by His beloved Father.

Let us behold this Man! He exercised all the virtues that could adorn humanity, and all the graces of the Holy Spirit. See His meekness, gentleness, patience, faith, fortitude, longsuffering, pity, and perfect love to God and man. O lovely character! O perfect pattern of holiness!

He endured all the desert of sin. He experienced the essence of suffering. All that was necessary for Justice to inflict on the Representative of myriads of sinners, in order to their eternal salvation — He endured. The cup of sorrow, of agony, of God's curse, was presented; it made Him tremble, it filled Him with distress and trouble; but He took it, and drained it to its very dregs! He conquered all our foes. But this was the hour of the powers of darkness. All the most wicked, powerful, and successful of the fallen spirits, were gathered together — for the last onset. He met them. He engaged with them. He conquered them. He triumphed over them. Blessed Jesus, I would give glory to Your name for conquering my infernal foes!

He answered to all the types of the law, whether offerer, offering, priest, altar, or temple; to all the predictions of the prophets, who wrote of Messiah suffering and dying for the sins of His people; to all the expectations of His saints, for the Savior was now come out of Zion, and one Man had appeared to die for the people. He satisfied God fully, and He should satisfy us. What a wondrous Man! Many remarkable people had appeared before — but none like Him. He stands single and alone. A wonder to all worlds — an object of admiration to saints and angels!

We are all called to BEHOLD Him. Pilate calls; He says, "Behold the man!" His Father calls us; He says, "Behold my servant whom I uphold, my elect in whom my soul delights!" Himself calls us; for He cries, "Behold Me, behold Me!"

Sinner, behold Him, for He suffers for you.

Seeker, behold Him, He is punished to save you.

Backslider, behold Him, He endures to recover you.

Lukewarm professor, behold Him, He sets an example before you.

Believer, behold Him, and learn to suffer patiently.

Behold — and adore Him heartily.

Behold — and trust in Him implicitly. My soul, behold the man!

See His grief-stricken countenance, His battered frame, His breaking heart, His bleeding brow; He is enduring all this for you! Behold Him, and do not doubt His love, nor question His veracity, nor fear your foes, nor dread your Heavenly Father's wrath! Behold Him, as the proof of God's love to you, as the confirmation of all the promises made to you, as the pledge of all the blessings set before you. Behold, and sympathize with Him, look on the pierced One, and "mourn for Him." Behold, and give yourself afresh unto Him; say anew, "I am the Lord's!" Behold, and crucify your flesh with its passions and lusts. Behold Him until a deep impression is made upon your heart, and the love of sin departs. Behold Him, if tempted to murmur, or complain, or repine at any of the dispensations of Divine Providence. Behold Him, if persecuted and hated of men for the Lord's sake — and learn to endure in silence, without feeling revenge, or indulging an unforgiving spirit. Behold Him, when Satan or the world allures you to sin, or would draw you from your God. Behold Him, when death stares you in the face, and the grave is ready for you. "Behold the man!"

Behold — and love Him more.

Behold — and imitate Him more.

Behold — and serve Him more.

Behold — and have fellowship with Him in His sufferings, that you may be made conformable unto His death. May the Man of Sorrows be daily before my eye; and may I only look from Him as such, to look forward for His coming in power and great glory. O to see Him descend in the clouds, and all the holy angels with Him, to be caught up to meet Him in the air, and so be forever with Him! What a contrast will there be, between His first and second coming; His cross — and His throne; His crown of thorns — and His crown of glory; as He appeared beside Pilate, before the Jewish rabble — and as surrounded with all the armies of Heaven, and all His saints with Him! May I not only see Him — but grace, and enjoy, the triumphs of that day!

35 God's Design in Revealing Sin

God's Design in Revealing Sin "Why do You show me iniquity?" Habakkuk 1:3

Part of the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of His people — is to reveal the iniquity within them. While to reveal iniquity without us — is one of the ends of Divine Providence. As believers in Jesus — we are daily learning more of the pollution and depravity of our nature; and as inhabitants of the world — we are daily discovering more of the sin that is in the world. If the Lord reveals iniquity to us as an act of grace, he leads us to sympathize with himself respecting it; and then we hate it, seek to free ourselves from it, and bear our testimony against it. The design on the Lord's part is always gracious; the effects on our part are various. The Lord's end is worthy of himself, and the result in our experience will be useful.

Let us ask with the prophet, "Why do You show me iniquity?"

First, to produce HUMILITY. We are prone to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think; we lose sight of our sinful origin; we forget our just desert; and we swell with self-importance! Then the Lord allows the corruption of our nature to work, the evils of the heart to appear — and we have a fresh view of our fallen condition — and what we really are! We see that our nature is radically bad, that our heart is a nest of unclean birds, and that our motives and actions are impure. This brings us down from our eminence, lays us in the dust, fills us with confusion, and we exclaim, with Job, "Behold, I am vile!" We are now forced into our proper place in the dust, and agree that God would be infinitely just in our eternal destruction.

Secondly, to endear the LORD JESUS. The Savior is never so precious — as when we have a vivid sense of our own sinfulness, and a manifestation of the sins from which He died to deliver us! He may have much lip-love — when we have wrong views of ourselves. But He will have heart-love — when the Spirit shows us our iniquities. Then we love Him, for his condescension in noticing us, for his grace in assuming our nature, and for his great mercy in putting "away our iniquities — by the sacrifice of himself." When we look up from the depths of humility, into which a discovery of sin has brought us — then the Savior does appear most lovely, his grace is precious, his name is sweet, and his salvation is glorious.

Yes, if Jesus is to be endeared to our hearts — the Lord must show us our iniquity.

Thirdly, to excite GRATITUDE. A sense of our just desert, on the one hand; and of the love of Jesus, on the other hand — will fill our hearts with gratitude! When we look unto the rock from whence we were hewn, and to the hole of the pit from whence we were dug; when we look at what our lives have been, and down into the Hell which we justly deserve — and realize the greatness of the mercy shown to us — we become sincerely grateful! And just in proportion as the Lord shows us iniquity, and we realize salvation from the desert of that iniquity — will be the depth and power of our gratitude. The Lord loves to see us grateful, to hear our feeble praises, and to observe the tear of gratitude starting in the eye — and therefore He shows us our iniquity!

Fourthly, to awaken CONCERN for others. For when we perceive sin in ourselves, and realize the desert of it; and then look around and see iniquity abounding in every direction, and realize something of the nature of that Hell which is the just punishment of such iniquities; a concern arises in our hearts for the perishing thousands that surround us. We do not half feel for their state — because we have not vivid views of iniquity; nor have we half the concern we ought to have for their deliverance from a deserved Hell. If we felt the concern we ought for them — how would we pray for them, watch for opportunities to speak to them, and use every means to snatch them as fire-brands from the flames? May the Lord awaken a deep and abiding concern for sinners in our hearts, even if it is necessary, in order thereto, to show us more of iniquity.

Fifthly, to lead us to ACTIVITY. We are not half alive in God's cause, nor half diligent enough in God's work. The truth of the gospel becomes common-place, and the condition of those around us ceases to impress us. We lose sight of the fact that sin is infinitely offensive to God, that those around us must be delivered from it — or perish for it. The thought of relatives and neighbors, and the mass of mankind going to an eternal Hell — does not affect us; therefore we slumber and sleep, procrastinate and put off, and are anything but active in God's cause. May the Lord so show us iniquity, in its nature, and in its consequences on those around us — as to stir us up to activity in His cause, and zeal for the conversion of souls.

Sixthly, to compel us to JUSTIFY God in His judgments. When we see what wickedness there is in our hearts, and in our world; and how that wickedness is in direct opposition to God's law, and is grieving God's heart — can we do otherwise than wonder at His forbearance, and justify Him in the judgments He inflicts? This closes the mouth from complaining, and the heart from repining; and, under the sorest visitations, we exclaim, "Righteous are You, O Lord!" The Lord is righteous in all that is brought upon us. "The Lord is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works."

Lastly, to fill us with admiration at His SOVEREIGN LOVE. He could not naturally love sinners. He could not love such as we are, or those who are around us — for anything in us, or for anything done by us. If he loves — it must be freely. If he blesses — it must be in sovereignty. But he has told us, that he has loved such as we are, with an everlasting love; and therefore with loving-kindness drew them to himself. That he has loved his chosen people, even as he has loved his only-begotten Son.

Now just in proportion to our knowledge of iniquity on the one hand, and of God's infinite love on the other — will be our admiration of the conduct of the Most High God. Those who know most of sin, and of their sinful selves — most admire the wondrous love of God; and if we are to be filled with admiration of God's love, we must be shown our iniquities. May the Lord so deal with us as . . .

to fill us with profound humility,

to endear to us the Lord Jesus,

to excite in us fervent gratitude,

to awaken in us a lively concern for the salvation of all around us,

to lead us actively to engage in every attempt to pluck sinners as brands from the burning,

to justify him heartily in all his judgments, and

to fill us with admiration of his sovereign love.

Reader, you must see iniquity, so as to hate it, seek the pardon of it, flee from it, and justify God in punishing it — or you will remain a stranger to salvation, to the joys of real religion, and to that holiness without which no man can see the Lord. Unless we see iniquity, flee to Jesus to be saved from it, and have our hearts set against it — we shall be eternally punished for it! Hell is the effect and natural consequence of sin. Hell is the sinner reaping what he has sown, and receiving the due desert of his deeds. May free grace save both writer and reader from ever experiencing it. "O Lord, pardon my iniquity — for it is great!" Psalms 25:11

36 Preservation Sought

Preservation Sought

"You have delivered my soul from death. Will not You deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?" Psalms 56:13 The realization of danger calls to reflection, and reflection often leads to renewed exercises of faith, and fresh applications to the Lord's throne of grace. David never felt so deeply, prayed so fervently, or wrote so profitably — as when he was in danger. Danger is the forerunner of deliverance — it comes to show us our need of God, to stir us up to apply to God, and to call into exercise the delivering hand of God. Past deliverances prompt us to apply for fresh manifestations of mercy; and the more we receive from God, the more we are encouraged to ask of Him, and expect from Him. He who has delivered — does deliver. In the text we have,

First, a grateful acknowledgment. "You have delivered my soul from death." God had delivered his body from natural death, and his soul from spiritual and eternal death. We were once all dead in sin. We would all have been dead in sin at this moment — if God had not of His rich grace "quickened us together with Christ." To be dead in sin — is the very worst state we can be in, and the most dangerous. While in it — we are satisfied with it, and never seek deliverance from it. The first feeling of danger, the first desire of deliverance, the first cry for mercy — is of the Lord. In religion, God always begins first. He quickens us — or we should never feel. He works in us — or we should never fear His wrath, nor seek for His mercy.

"You have delivered my soul from death." The delivering agent — is the Holy Spirit. He is the sole Author of all spiritual life. The season of deliverance — is the time of our conversion to God; when we turn from all our idols, to seek the living and true God. The evidences of our deliverance are:

prayer, which is the breath of the new-born soul, the putting forth of the life of God in the soul of man;

godly sorrow, or grief of heart for sin, that we have grieved God, and been the cause of the death of the Son of God;

faith, or simple trust in the Word and work of Jesus, for access to God, and acceptance with God;

a desire to be kept from falling — into sin, from falling so as to dishonor God, and disgrace religion.

Wherever these evidences are found, however weak or imperfect they may be — there is the life of God; there is the work of the Holy Spirit; and there is the warrant to say, "You have delivered my soul from death!"

Secondly, a pathetic appeal. "Will not You deliver my feet from falling?" Spiritual blessings are always connected. Like the links in a chain — the one draws the other after it. Having one, we feel we need more, we desire more, we seek more — and then we receive more. He who thinks he has grace enough — has none. He who feels his heart set upon obtaining spiritual blessings, has at

least one spiritual blessing; and that one the most important, for he has LIFE — spiritual life; as it is only spiritual life — which thirsts, pants, and prays for spiritual blessings.

"But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold!" Psalms 73:2. The Christian is always on dangerous ground!

We may fall into sin — even when we cannot fall into Hell.

We may break our bones — when we cannot break our neck.

We may make sad work for repentance — when we do not incur a sentence of final condemnation.

We are liable to fall by error — which is specious and powerful.

We are liable to fall by Satan — who is crafty and malicious.

We are liable to fall by our weakness — which is great and often appears increasing.

We are liable to fall by sinful pleasures — in which the flesh takes delight.

We are liable to fall by our unhallowed tempers — which need constant watchfulness and incessant prayer.

We are liable to fall by erroneous people — who may, like Satan, lie in wait to deceive us.

We therefore need keeping — constant keeping, divine keeping; and this made David cry, "Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of Your wing!" "Hold me up — and I shall be safe!" Psalms 119:117 Our path is often slippery — and we are apt to be incautious. But it is our unspeakable mercy, that God has promised to keep us. "He keeps the feet of His saints." But He will have us feel our need of his keeping, make us willing to be kept by Him, and plead with Him to keep us. Hence the text, "Will not You keep my feet from falling?" You have given me life, hitherto preserved that life, made great and precious promises — will You not keep me? Your mercy is tender; your precepts require of me; I heartily desire to be kept; you know my foolishness, weakness, and inexperience; will you not keep my feet from falling? — Blessed spirit of prayer this! Sweet sense of weakness this! May we ever possess the one — and experience the other.

Thirdly, a holy design. "That I may walk before the Lord, in the light of the living." I wish to make progress; I would not lie down, sit, or stand still; I wish to walk on. To make progress in holiness — is the mark at which I aim. To make progress in usefulness — is the end for which I wish to live. To make progress in happiness — will adorn my profession, and bring honor to God.

I would walk before the Lord, as a loving child before a loving father; as under his eye — courting inspection; as within his hearing — wishing all to be seen. I would be impressed with such a sense of God's presence — as will produce caution, circumspection, and daily watchfulness.

"In the land of the living." That is, among those who are alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord; among those who live to God, and live for God. I would walk before them, so as to convince them of my sincerity; with them, so as to improve, or improve by them. So as to do good or get good continually.

"In the light." Not courting obscurity, or concealment; but acting so strictly in accordance with my profession, as neither to be afraid nor ashamed to be seen by any of the saints. This posture is safe — a Father's watchful eye resting upon us; it is wise — for it preserves from innumerable evils; and it is honorable — standing like Solomon's servants, always in the presence of the King.

Beloved, are you quickened? Can you say, "I was dead — but God has raised me from the dead; I was blind — but He has given me sight; I was an alien — but His grace has made me a child?" Are you concerned to be divinely kept? Do you fear danger, tremble at sin, and daily cry out, "Hold me up — and I shall be safe?" Is it your object to walk before God, as your observer; with God, as your father; and after God, as your example?

These are the best proofs of Christianity, far better than priding oneself in a sound creed; trusting to mere professions; or relying on religious ceremonies. A sound creed is exceedingly valuable, if it is adorned with a holy life! Doctrines that lead us to hate sin, loathe self, prize the Savior, and cleave to the Lord — are of the greatest importance! The ceremonies that Christ himself has instituted, are of great use — if they are not misplaced, or idolized. May we have grace to use — but not abuse, God's truth, or God's ordinances; that we may bring glory to His most holy and ever-blessed name.

37 The Final Testimony

The Final Testimony

"Truly, I say unto you, inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren — you have done it unto Me." Matthew 25:40 The Lord Jesus here gives us one view of the final judgment: saints and sinners separated; saints rewarded — and sinners punished, and both according to their works. The whole mass here presented, are those who lived under the gospel where it was known and acknowledged, and who themselves made some profession of it. Hence, the one party is commended and rewarded, for what was done to the Lord's people; and the other was condemned and punished, for not doing what they ought to have done, and had an opportunity of doing. In the church of Christ there is variety, for the least implies greater.

Some are small — some great;

some are feeble — and some strong;

some are rich — and some poor;

some are gifted — and some almost destitute of anything resembling a gift;

there are spiritual babes, young men, and fathers. The least, may be those who have little grace and no gifts, poor in situation, lowly in appearance, reputed as nothing among men. The state and stature of the members — are under the direction of Jesus; as are their circumstances and situation. He has placed each in the body, as it has pleased Him. To every one is given, both gifts and grace, according to the sovereign pleasure of our God and Savior. In the church there is unity — all are brethren. Adopted, by the same act of sovereign, distinguishing grace; born again, by the agency, power, and operation of the same Holy Spirit; proving their adoption by the same graces, for they are all acknowledged to be the sons of God, by faith in Christ Jesus.

Thus, all stand in the same relation to God — for they are all children; to the Lord Jesus Christ — for they are all His brethren; and to the Holy Spirit — for each one is His temple.

Loved with the same love,

chosen by the same sovereign grace,

redeemed by the same sin-atoning blood,

regenerated by the same Spirit,

sanctified by the same truth, and

destined to inherit the same Heaven

— they are all one in Christ Jesus. In the Church of Christ there is identity — they are not only one in Christ — but they are one with Christ.

They are His flock — and He is their shepherd.

They are His bride — and He is their bridegroom.

They are His branches — and He is the living vine.

They are His body — and He is their head.

O how close the union! They are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. He watches over them, walks with them, dwells in them, and communicates to them.

Christ and His people are one. United in holy love, love so strong and durable, that nothing shall ever separate or divide them. Hence the apostle triumphantly demands, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord!" The Savior recognizing this oneness between His people and Himself, bears testimony to the fact — that what is done to His people, He takes as done to Himself. Does Saul of Tarsus persecute the saints at Jerusalem, and go to Damascus to bring the believers bound to Jerusalem for punishment? He is arrested by the way, stopped in his career, and it is demanded of him, "Why do you persecute them?" No. But, "Why persecute you Me?" So here in Matthew 25:1-46 — is a hungry Christian fed, or a thirsty Christian supplied with drink, or a naked Christian clothed, or a houseless Christian sheltered, or a sick or imprisoned Christian visited? Jesus says, "You did it unto Me." Wondrous union, this! Extraordinary representation of it! What tender sympathy must Jesus have with those, who are thus one with Himself!

See then, how close the union between Jesus and His people — they are one. One body, influenced by one spirit. He the head — they the different members. The least is as really united to the head, and is as precious, as the greatest.

How watchful the eye of Jesus, over His people. The eye in the Head, sees whatever is done to one of His members.

How tenacious the memory of the King of saints. He will not forget the good deeds of His people. The cup of cold water given to another, because he belongs to Christ, will not lose its reward. Nor will He forget, how some have neglected His poor, sick, and persecuted ones; but will tell them of it before assembled millions, when He sits on the throne of His glory, and exclude them from His kingdom for it! O brethren, let us not love in word, only — but in deed and in truth; thus shall we prove that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. How careful we should be in our treatment of our brethren — doing or neglecting. Who acts toward a poor believer — as he would act toward Christ personally? But we ought to do so — if Christ and the believer are but one.

How calmly we may leave all our affairs with Jesus. Am I neglected? Jesus knows it, He observes it, He will settle with those who neglect me. Am I hated, misrepresented, slandered, persecuted? Jesus is privy to the whole of it, and says, "Avenge not yourselves; vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." It is wrong, then, to encourage resentful feelings, or desire to take vengeance. How injurious to me, how contrary to the direction of my wise, all-knowing, and loving Lord.

How often we forget, how very seldom we realize the fact — that Christ and His people are one. One, at all seasons. One, under all circumstances. One, in poverty. One, in sickness. One, in prison. One, in death. O for grace to look upon myself daily, yes, hourly — as one with Christ!

O for grace, to look upon every believer, whatever his creed, meeting with whatever sect or party, differing from me ever so much — as one with Christ! May I never forget, that if I injure a believer — I injure Christ. If I wound a believer — I wound Christ. If I neglect a believer in need, or sickness, or persecuted for righteousness' sake — I neglect Christ.

How different the judgment will be, according to the Savior's representation of it — to what many people expect. Not only will gross sinners be condemned — but professors, who have simply omitted to honor Christ in His members. Not only will actual transgressions be denounced and punished — but the neglect of positive duties, or omitting to carry out the law of love. May every thought of my heart, every word of my mouth, and every act of my life — proceed from, and be regulated by, that new commandment which Jesus gave when he said, "I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you — you must also love one another!"

38 Mourning Ended

Mourning Ended "The days of your mourning shall be ended." Isaiah 60:20

Abe you a mourning Christian, one of Zion's doves. If so, I bring you glad tidings of great joy — the end is just before you, the place is prepared for you, when and where, the days of your mourning shall be ended. Your Savior is speaking to you, when He says, "Blessed are you who mourn — for you shall be comforted." His Father sent Him into the world to "comfort all who mourn"; and He tabernacled here among us "as one that comforts the mourners."

Mourning, though lengthy — is limited; though sharp — it must be short. "Weeping may endure for a night — but joy comes in the morning." That morning will soon break upon us, and all its glorious consequences will be realized by us. Yes, soon, very soon, the days of our mourning shall be ended. In the passage we have,

First, the believer's Present Experience, "Mourning." O how many things conspire to make him mourn. In himself, he sees and feels so much that is opposed to the will of God. So much sin. So much selfishness. Such awful corruptions. Such imperfect graces. A painful, and almost incessant conflict. "He would do good — but evil is present with him." To will that which is good — he feels at full liberty; but how to perform it — perplexes and troubles him. He thirsts and pants for perfect purity — but swarms of evil thoughts, floods of foul corruption, and troops of sinful lusts, dismay and distress him. He daily finds the flesh lusting against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh — so that he cannot do the things that he would. If he could but be holy! If he could but abstain from sin! If he could but cleanse his heart! But he cannot, and therefore he mourns sorely and often.

Besides this, there is so much in the family, in the world, and even in the church of God — which causes him grief, and fills him with sadness. His house is not so with God — as he wishes it to be. The world still lies in the wicked one. The church is divided, worldly, and lukewarm. These things make him mourn.

He also mourns the absence of Jesus. His Lord is away. He is gone to receive the kingdom. He longs to see the face of his Beloved, to stand before Him, to walk with Him, and to receive directly from Him. But this is not his privilege at present, and at times doubts and fears creep in, and he fears it never will be. His gracious presence is but seldom enjoyed — and he fears that His glorious presence may be denied him! The very thought, the mere supposition, fills him with grief and sorrow. His harp is often on the willows. He weeps by the streams of Babylon. He longs to flee away and be at rest. But his very mourning springs from grace — and proves his new birth. It is evangelical. It has always hope at the bottom. It is limited to days; "the days of your mourning shall be ended." This is then,

Secondly, his Future Prospect. The last mourning day will soon come, and then there will be . . .

no more sighs — but songs;

no more sorrows — but joys;

no more sadness — but satisfaction. The soul will be set free at death — and the body at the resurrection. The emancipated soul is perfectly holy, fully delivered from indwelling sin; it sees Jesus as He is, for absent from the body, it is present with the Lord. It enjoys the company of the glorified saints and holy angels. It enjoys perfect and everlasting freedom, from all its fears, darkness, and privations — and is perfectly happy. It finds as David anticipated when he says, "In your presence is fullness of joy, and at Your right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

Mourning is ended, sackcloth and ashes are put off, and the wedding garment is put on; the sable shroud is laid aside, and the pure white robe is worn. The soul now greatly rejoices in the Lord, and eternally triumphs in its God. It is with Jesus, it is like Jesus, it is full of love to Jesus, it is perfectly happy in Jesus. It sees His face, it hears His voice, it possesses His blessings, it is ravished with His love. O unutterable joy! O inconceivable glory! The days of its mourning are ended — but its day of joy and perfect satisfaction, will never end. It is forever!

Mourning believer, you will soon go to be with Jesus — or, which sometimes appears to be better still, Jesus will come to be with you. Yes, Jesus said, "I will come again," and He will. He will soon be here. His chariot will not long delay. The whole creation groans, the whole church mourns; and His beloved bride is inviting and entreating His return. He is coming! Yes, He is coming — and when once He appears, the mourning days of His beloved and blood-bought bride will be ended! O glorious termination of our course of sorrow! O glorious consummation of our hopes and desires! O happiness, full, perfect, and perpetual! "Come, Lord Jesus! Come quickly!" But how different the case of the unsaved sinner. He laughs now — but he will mourn and weep then. That is an awful passage for the sinner, "Behold He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen." O sinner, how will you endure the day of His coming? How will you stand when He appears? His countenance will be like lightning, and His eyes as a flame of fire, and His voice as the majestic roar of many waters. What will you do? How will you feel? What can you say? O flee, flee to His open arms now; rest not until your sins are washed away in His blood, and your person is justified in His glorious righteousness! Seek, seek and obtain a pardon, and a sentence of justification from His lips.

Reader, do you now mourn over sin? Your own sins? Your heart sins? Do you mourn over all around you, sighing and crying for all the abominations that are done in the land? Happy mourner — you shall be comforted. Are you living in the joyful expectation of your mourning days being soon terminated? Death to you, will be the gate of life. The coming of Jesus, will be the grand Jubilee of your soul. Is the coming of Jesus your blessed hope, the object of your ardent, unquenchable desire? If so, blessed are you, for the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. Lift up your head, for your redemption draws near, deliverance is at hand, the days of your mourning will soon be ended!

39 The Indispensable Evidence

The Indispensable Evidence "If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ — he does not belong to Christ." Romans 8:9 The Apostle is dwelling upon the high privileges, and distinct peculiarities of the Lord's people. He affirms, that to them, there is no condemnation; and that their union to Christ is so strong and permanent, that there shall be no separation. Delivered from the law that condemns, united to Christ who justifies — their present lot is precious, and their future prospects glorious. True, they may be persecuted, tried, and tempted; but the indwelling Spirit working for them, and the Advocate above pleading their cause, conquest was certain; yes, He could triumph and exclaim, "In all these things, we are more than conquerors, through Him that loved us."

What a mercy to be free from condemnation! What a privilege to be assured of final triumph over every foe! But this mercy, this privilege, is the common portion of all the Lord's people, all whom Jesus claims. Can we know then, who they are who belong to Jesus? Can we ascertain if we are among the privileged number? Yes, the text cuts off all mere pretenders — but it establishes the claim of every true believer. Let us consider, First, The CLAIM to belong to Christ. The claim is to be considered His disciple. A disciple is one, who having selected a master, puts himself under His instruction, and takes a place at His feet. Hence Moses speaks of the saints, "They sit down at Your feet, every one shall receive of His Words." To be a disciple, one must have a humble, teachable spirit, and be willing, yes, desirous to be taught by Jesus. We are not Christ's, if we have not been brought to His feet to be taught by Him. The claim is to be considered His servants. The servants of Christ are more honorable than earth's princes. They obey His Word, do His will, suffer in His cause, and follow in His footsteps now; and by-and-bye that will be realized which Jesus spoke, "If any serves Me, let him follow Me, and where I am, there also shall My servant be; if any man serves Me — him shall my Father honor." No one is really Christ's servant — who does not follow, or imitate Him; but those who do, may look forward to honor; such honor, as only God can bestow, and only the servants of Christ will receive. The claim is to be considered His brethren. Though exalted high at the right hand of the Father, He is not ashamed, before all the celestial host, to call His poor people, who are suffering here below, brethren. They are bone of His bone, flesh of His flesh; they have the same spirit, and constitute so many parts of the one great family, destined to honor, and glorify God forever. O what an honor to be a brother of Jesus! Jesus, who is the brightness of glory, King of kings, and Lord of lords. But this honor have all his saints. The claim is to be considered His bride. The whole church is the bride of Jesus, the Lamb's wife. So represented because of the closeness of His union with them, and the greatness of His love to them. It is a peculiar dignity put upon them. A dignity in which even the angels do not share. His bride will partake with Him of all His honor, happiness and splendor. She will share with Him in all the magnificence and glory of the world to come. Unutterable privilege this — to be the bride of Jesus, the sharer of all His wealth, dignity, and honor! What a claim for such poor, depraved, sinful worms as we are to make, to be the disciples, servants, brethren, and bride of Jesus. But this is not all, such claim to be entitled to all the promises of His Word — the many, exceeding great, and very precious promises. Promises to fulfill which, would exhaust any

treasures — but the infinite treasures of God Himself. Promises, as vast as eternity, and as varied as the needs of man. Promises which have sustained, supported, and supplied millions; and will sustain, support, and supply millions more. All the promises are in Jesus, and all belong to those who belong to Jesus.

They claim to be entitled to all the provisions of His house. The glorious gospel, the blessed ordinances, and the presence of the great householder himself. Oh, that gospel, so full of grace, so radiant with the love of God, so suited to the poor sinner, so adapted to the needy soul! Those ordinances, in which God meets with man, unfolds His glories, imparts His blessings, and nourishes and refreshes the soul.

They claim also to be entitled to all the prospects of His chosen people. To be kings and priests unto God, and to reign on the earth. To be filled with all the fullness of God. To be exactly like Jesus, and eternally with Jesus.

What a claim! A claim which embraces all God's promises, all His churches provision, and all the glowing prospects of His beloved ones. We must now consider,

Secondly, The REQUIREMENT necessary to establish such a claim. "They have the Spirit of Christ". The most holy and ever blessed Holy Spirit — the author of every gracious and holy disposition in those who belong to Christ. How shall we know if we have the Spirit of Christ? By this: The Holy Spirit always convinces us of our need of Christ. He shows us that Jesus, and Jesus only will meet our case; that we must have Christ — or perish; that there is for us . . .

no pardon — but in His blood;

no justification — but in His righteousness;

no holiness — but by His Spirit;

no obedience — but through His grace;

no Heaven — but by His merits. The Holy Spirit conducts to the cross of Christ. He will not allow us to stay at the crucifix, at saints, or angels, or even our good works; but He leads us away from all — to the cross! There we bring our load of guilt, our slavish fears, our heart-breaking anxieties; and there we obtain pardon, find peace, and receive grace. The Holy Spirit conforms us to the image of Christ. He unfolds Jesus, leads us to fall in love with Jesus, and generates in our hearts the unquenchable desire, to be like Jesus. Under His teaching, we often exclaim, O to be like Him — as holy as He is holy — as pure as He is pure! O to breathe His loving spirit, to walk in His steps, and to be exactly conformed to Him! Nor will those who have the Spirit of Christ, ever be satisfied until they awake up in His likeness! The Holy Spirit consecrates us to the service of Christ. Saved by His grace, comforted by His cross, destined to be conformed to His image — we cannot but wish to be engaged to Him, and employed for Him, to glorify Him in our bodies, souls, and spirits, which are His.

If we have been convinced of our need of Christ, led to the cross of Christ, are being conformed to the image of Christ, and are consecrated to the service and glory of Christ — we have the Spirit of Christ. The Spirit of Christ, is the Spirit of life — which quickens us; the Spirit of love — which sanctifies us; the Spirit of liberty — which frees us; and the Spirit of liberality — which influences

us. The Spirit of Christ, therefore, is opposed to death, enmity, bondage, and covetousness. O that we may not only have the Spirit of Christ — but be filled with the Spirit, and be influenced by Him in every act, and every moment! The Lord Jesus will not own all that claim Him, and wish to be considered His. Many will say, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, and in Your name done many wonderful works? Then will I profess unto them, I never knew you! Depart from me — you that work iniquity."

Unfounded confidence is exceedingly dangerous. Self-examination is therefore necessary. The indwelling Spirit of Christ is the great proof and evidence that we are Christ's. Nothing short of this will do, nothing short of this should satisfy us. If we are satisfied with anything short of this, we shall be found building on a sandy foundation, and our house will fall.

Reader, search your heart, examine your life. Have you the Spirit of Jesus? That Spirit of love, power, and of a sound mind? That Spirit of meekness, patience, fortitude, and forbearance? That Spirit of faith, fervor, and devotion? The Spirit that rested on Jesus, acted in Jesus, and was manifested by Jesus? We must resemble Christ in some measure on earth — if we hope to dwell with Him forever in Heaven! The Spirit of Christ, always makes its possessor like Christ; and just in proportion as we are under the teaching, leading, and guidance of the Holy Spirit — shall we resemble Jesus. The Spirit always glorifies Jesus — inwardly by teaching us our need of Him, and misery without Him; outwardly, by conforming us to Him, and making us resemble Him. O that the Spirit of Christ may dwell in us richly — teaching, guiding, sanctifying, comforting, and using us to glorify His dear and exalted name!

40 Individual Duty

Individual Duty "Occupy until I come." Luke 12:13

"It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." And it is equally true and faithful, that He is gone to receive a kingdom, and intends to return. We have His Word and His Spirit; but, as the man, we have not His presence, for He is at His Father's right hand, waiting until His enemies are made His footstool. We are recognized as His, and are required not only to confess Him — but to be employed for Him. To every Christian He has given some talent; and to every one who has any talent, He says, "Occupy until I come."

Here is an EVENT referred to — the second coming of Jesus. He is now absent — but He will return. His coming is certain — for He has pledged His Word: it is necessary — for the present state both of the world and the church requires it. When He will come is unknown. He intended it to be a profound secret. That period is not made known either by Himself or His servants. It is concealed for wise and holy purposes. It may be immediately, or it may not be for a long time to come. We can fix no date, and if we are wise we shall not attempt it. It is one of the secret things which belong to the Lord. All we have to do is, to keep it constantly in view, act in full prospect of it, and be ready at any time for it. It will never be anything but a mercy to the diligent, devoted, and decided servant of God. Not to know when He will come — but to be ready for His coming — is my business and yours. His coming, whenever it is, will be sudden. As a thief in the night the Son of Man will come — when men are crying, 'Peace and safety' — when all are slumbering and sleeping — when some have the talent wrapped up in the napkin and put carefully away — He will come. Sudden as the lightning's flash, will Jesus the second time appear.

It will be solemn. The last trumpet will sound. "The Heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare." The dead in Christ will arise. He will appear in the clouds, and all His holy angels with Him. The convulsed elements, the rising dead, the roar in the skies, and His appearance in His own glory, and His father's glory — will make it most solemn.

It will be magnificently glorious. Unequaled in grandeur, splendor and majesty. Now He appears, not as the babe in Bethlehem, not as the man of sorrows, not as the thorn-crowned king, not as the crucified Nazarene — but as King of kings, and Lord of lords, and as the Head of His body the church. Robed with light, and crowned with glory, His very countenance will strike terror into his foes, and make them cry for the rocks to fall on them, and the hills to cover them, and hide them from His piercing eye. "Behold, He comes with clouds, and every eye shall see Him, and they also that pierced Him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him." Hence, also, His own words: "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he who watches and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame." "Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord, when He comes, shall find so doing."

Here is a COMMAND — "Occupy until I come." The Lord gives talents to the whole of His servants. To some five, to some two, and to some one. Or, He distributes His money; each receives a pound, and each is expected to turn it to account. The talents are to be employed in order to be improved and increased. He who has, and employs his talent, improves it; and to him that has employed and improved it shall be given, and he shall have abundance. We may know what we have — but we do not know what it may become, if diligently employed. The industrious tradesman may begin with a very small capital — but by "tact and push" he may become one of our merchant princes; born in a hired cottage, he may end his days in a mansion of his own; in youth obliged to borrow of others, in old age able to lend to many. So it is in Christ's kingdom — we rise by degrees, and rise only by diligence, devotedness, and zeal. Every servant has some talent — not one is left without: if he has not five pounds — he has at least one, and that one is to be employed.

Some have a talent to teach children, and to unfold to their minds the gospel of the blessed God. This is an important talent — not as conspicuous as some — but perhaps quite as useful. Its place is not to be hidden in the napkin — but used in the school-room. It is to be feared, that while there are many of our schools languishing or kept small for lack of teachers, there are many in our churches and congregations who have this talent — but consider themselves exempt from the command to use it. They are too "respectable," that is, they are too proud. They work too hard in the week, that is, they may spend all their energies in the world and for the flesh, and then must be excused because no energies are left to be employed for Jesus. Time would fail to enumerate the innumerable excuses made for idleness, pride, selfishness, and carnality in its thousand forms! If you can teach, and do not, be sure, on good grounds, that your Lord does not want you, or expect you, to teach. If you did teach — but have given it up, be sure that you have your Lord's warrant, signed by His own hand, for quitting the field. Children are growing up in ignorance, young people are going to Hell in droves — and you wrap your talent in a napkin, and spend your Lord's day in self-indulgence and criminal ease! This is not obeying the command, "Occupy until I come."

Some have a talent for preaching — village preaching, or occasional preaching — but not for the pastoral office — and they are required to preach. But because they have not a more conspicuous gift, they do nothing — and the poor villagers may go to Hell, if every one acts like they do. We know how the flesh cries out, the distance is great, the weather may be bad, the cottage-room is inconvenient, the congregation is small. Or, I have tried — but seem to have preached in vain. Look at Jesus Himself, when he went through the towns and villages preaching. Did He flinch because of weather, distance, inconvenience, or even lack of success? No, His Father's will was His rule; and to glorify His Father's name was His highest end. Look at the apostles, persecuted, defamed, made a spectacle and a gazing-stock to angels and to men; did they give up their commission, wrap up their talent in the napkin, and ingloriously quit the field? No, they all acted upon the principle which caused one to exclaim, in reference to bonds and imprisonment, "None of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry that I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God." Over kind wives, and over tender parents, by persuasions keep many at home for their own gratification, who ought to be employed in publishing the good news of a free salvation to poor ignorant sinners. The flesh, which ought to be crucified — is indulged; the devil who ought to be resisted — is attended to; and so the work of the Lord is neglected, and our villages and

hamlets are left in darkness, ignorance, and death. How many sit and hear sermons month after month — who ought to go out and preach them! If they can preach one sermon a week, and there is any place needing the gospel at hand, they ought to preach it; and if they can only preach one sermon a month, they ought to do that. How different would be the state of the villages of England — if every Christian had laid out his talent instead of laying it up!

Reader, can you speak of Jesus, in plain English, for twenty minutes, to a dozen or a score poor cottagers? Is there any village, or back street, or dark district, in your town — where you may so speak? If so, do you use your talent? If not, are you justified in burying your Lord's money in the earth? Are you attending to His command, "Occupy until I come."

Some have a talent for writing, and they could write letters full of simple gospel, accompanied with pointed appeals, loving exhortations, and urgent entreaties. To such, Jesus says, "Occupy until I come." Some can engage in vocal prayer — this is a talent, and should be employed. Nor should a nervous feeling, or fear of not shining before others — cause anyone to wrap up their talent in the napkin.

Some have a talent for singing — God has given them a voice, an ear, and grace in the heart, and this talent should be used for God's glory. Some have a talent for conversation — they can interest and impress others when they talk with them; they should be careful to speak of Jesus, and try and win souls for Him. Some could, by visiting and persuasion, induce people to attend public worship who neglect it; and they should endeavor to crowd the house. Some have money — that is a talent, and God requires that we use it for Him.

Reader, I know not what talent you have; but you have some. It may be only one — or it may be several. Are you using your talent for Jesus? Are you filling a place in the field, performing a work in the world, or, in the words of the text, are you occupying until Jesus comes?

Every talent brings with it responsibility. It is given us for the good of others. We are bound to use it. We must give an account of what we have done with it. Every one of us is bound by the command of Jesus. He is our lawful King. We are His subjects, whom He has redeemed by His blood from a fearful doom, that we may do His will, glorify His name on earth, and then reign with Him in Heaven. We are bound to use our talents — the whole of them — and to use them industriously, hopefully, and because our Lord requires us to do so, and will soon come, demand an account, and reward every one of us according to His works.

Authority — His authority — binds us — but gratitude should constrain us to do all we can for His glory and praise. Reader, what has Jesus done for you? Do you know? What are you doing for Jesus? Are you ashamed to say? What might you do? What has Jesus promised you? Can you guess? Nay, it is so great and glorious, that it has not entered into the heart of man to conceive! Can you expect so much from Him — and yet manifest so little love, and be satisfied to do so little for Him? Take down your napkin, unwrap the talent, put the money into the bank, and get the interest ready for when the Master comes. Can you teach? Let the next Lord's-day find you in the Sunday School. Can you preach? Look out for some neglected village, or blind lane or alley, and begin at once to

"Tell to sinners round

What a dear Savior you have found."

Villagers do not need long, dry, tedious discourses; they love something short, plain, pointed, warm from the heart, full of Christ, and corroborated by the man's own experience. Better interest for fifteen minutes — than speak sixty without! Can you write? Write at once to one or more with a view to save the soul. Can you pray vocally? Be sure and be regular at the prayer-meeting. Can you sing? Let the church and congregation have the benefit of your voice. Can you converse? Visit on purpose to speak of Jesus. Can you induce children to come to the Sunday School, or adults to come and bear the gospel? Try. Begin at once. Let no one near you have to say, "I was never asked to go to chapel. No one ever invited my children to the school. No one ever spoke to me about my soul." Have you money? Give a fair proportion to God's cause, to carry on His glorious work in the world. This will be to carry out the Lord's command, "Occupy until I come."

Let each one of us ask — first, Do I know what talent I have? Have I examined? Did I ever try if I could teach, preach, pray, sing, write, converse, or induce people to seek the salvation of their souls?

Secondly, Do I realize my responsibility for the use of the talent of talents with which the Lord has entrusted me?

Thirdly, Am I zealously employing my whole talent for the Lord?

Fourthly, Am I expecting my Lord's return; and, therefore, endeavoring so to live, so to act, and so to work, as to be ready to meet Him, and present my account to Him?

Fifthly, Is my talent, or any part of it, wrapped up in the napkin? Methinks there were never so many napkins in use in the church of God as now. We have napkins of all sorts, and all sizes. They look so white, they are folded so tastefully, they are laid up so carefully, that few suspect what they are made of, what they contain, or that they will bring shame and confusion upon their owners at last. It is to these napkins, that we must ascribe our lack of village preachers, Sunday school teachers, tract distributors, visitors of the sick, praying brethren, good singing, useful conversation, crowded chapels, and full exchequers. Whatever the Lord may find in my possession when He comes, may he never find a napkin! He left His own buried in His tomb, and what a mercy it would be if every one found in the church were buried there too.

41 Converse With the Past

Converse With the Past "Ask now the days that are past." Deuteronomy 4:32

If we would be wise — we must converse with the past, as well as with the present. Mighty minds have inhabited our world, great wonders have been wrought — therefore important lessons are to be learned. We may take God's book and converse with man from the creation. Or, we may take man's books, and review any portion of the past. But either would be too much for this article. Let us therefore confine our attention to our own history. Let us look back over our past days, ask a few questions, and assign a few reasons for doing so.

First, let us REVIEW our past days. As men, there are the days of infancy, childhood, youth, and manhood; of the former we know comparatively little, of the latter much more. Close your eyes — and go calmly over them. As sinners, there are the days of carelessness, conviction, concern, and consideration; again, carefully review these. As Christians, there are the days of conversion, instruction, correction, manifestation, temptation, prosperity, adversity, bondage, liberty, light, and darkness. Now, go over these.

What changes we have passed through! What scenes we have witnessed! What sorrows we have felt! What joys we have experienced! But having obtained help of God — we continue to the present time. The worst is behind us — and the best, the brightest, is before us.

Secondly, let us ask a few suitable QUESTIONS. Let us inquire, if we ever found any solid pleasure in sin — any true peace without piety — any real ground for our slavish fears — any truth in Satan's suggestions? Let us inquire, if we ever gained anything by compromising with the world — or lost anything by living as a Christian? Let us inquire, if God has ever withheld any good thing from us? Let us appeal to our own personal experience, and ask, if God has not been faithful — if we have not proved the Bible to be true — if we have not found Satan to be a liar — if our doubts and fears have not been wrong?

"Ask now the days that are past," for an answer to these questions. Let them be well considered, duly pondered, and slowly and honestly answered. We shall find the employment profitable, and refreshing to our souls.

Thirdly, let us give some REASONS for conversing with the past. Properly attended to — it will lead us to praise God for the past. We shall see so many proofs of His forbearance, faithfulness, and love. And as we count our Ebenezers, and read their inscriptions — we shall be ready to say, "I will bless the Lord at all times, His praise shall continually be in my mouth!" The Lord deserves our praises, He loves our praises, He condescends to ask for our praises; let us therefore review the past, until our ungrateful hearts break forth in praise and thanksgiving.

Properly attended to — it will lead us to exercise hope in the future. Past mercies, past interventions, and past deliverances, rightly viewed — will lead us to hope in God, and to say with the Apostle, "He who has delivered, does deliver, and in Him we trust, that He will yet deliver us."

We shall encourage others by our testimony. Few things are more encouraging, than to hear the Lord's people recount the Lord's mercies. O that there was more of this!

Properly attended to — it will lead us also, with confidence, to plead with God for blessings. New blessings. Great blessings. Needed blessings. Having given so many and so often — when we were so vile and so undeserving — we shall take courage to plead with Him, to give us even greater blessings still.

Properly attended to — it will enable us to resist the devil in time to come. Reviewing the past, we shall be reminded of many a deadly conflict, and many a glorious victory; and this will strengthen our faith in our glorious Captain, in our well-tried weapons, and in our directions for conducting the war.

Finally, we shall learn what we have gained by experience. What knowledge — what courage — what confidence — what bright evidences — what well-grounded assurance that we shall ultimately be "more than conquerors, through Him who loved us." In looking over the records of past ages, we may ask:

What has been the sinners state — but misery?

What has been his course — but folly?

What has been his doom — but disappointment, disgrace, and woe?

What has been the saints comfort — but . . .

God's Word,

Christ's work,

the Spirit's witness, and

the assurance that all things were working for his good!

What has been his wisdom — but . . .

separation from the world,

close walking with God,

imitating the conduct of Jesus, and

losing sight of himself, that he may aim singly at the Lord's glory!

What has been his end — but peace? "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright — for the end of that man is peace." In reviewing the past, we must see, that our own course has been such as to lead us to lay our mouths in the dust, giving glory to God. If we ask the days that are past, and wait for their reply — we shall hear them say, "Your conduct has been unworthy of you — but the Lord's conduct reflects everlasting honor upon him.

You have been false — but He faithful;

you have been changeable — but He always the same;

you have forsaken Him — but He has pursued you with His love;

you have deserved His wrath — but He has crowned you with loving-kindness and tender mercy!

Brethren, let us praise the Lord, for "it is of the Lord's mercies, that we are not consumed, and because His compassions fail not; they are new every morning, and great in His faithfulness." Let us join with David and sing, "Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits!" And let us end the year as we began it — by exercising faith in the blood of Jesus, remembering that still, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. Praise, everlasting praise, to God our Father, Jesus our Savior, and the Holy Spirit our Comforter Amen.

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