

STREAMS OF REFRESHING FROM THE FOUNTAIN OF LIFE

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A collection of articles and writings by H.H. Snell from Streams of Refreshing From the Fountain of Life, covering various biblical topics and Christian teaching.

33 Chapters

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Streams of Refreshing From the Fountain of Life

Preface

This little volume is about JESUS the Son of God, and sets forth God's way of saving sinners. It is hoped that the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ will be found the most prominent object in it, and that it is calculated not only to arrest the careless and thoughtless, but to confirm and comfort weak and troubled saints.

In the blood of Jesus God speaks peace and love to every sinner that believes; and that same precious blood enables the believer to draw near and keep near to God. The blood of Christ, being the true ground of peace and source of confidence in God; gives rest of conscience in God's presence, where Jesus now is, and fills the heart with praise.

Many believers, however, are in great bondage. They truly look to Christ for salvation, and have eternal life, though they are scarcely sensible of it. Like Lazarus, when he left the tomb, they really have life, but are unable to walk in liberty, to minister for the Lord, or happily confess His name, because of the grave-clothes which envelop them. They struggle; but they are fettered, and need to be loosed. Some vainly try to get liberty by looking into their own hearts, or are expecting to receive it from some man, instead of looking only to Christ, and believing His Word. It is of the utmost importance that the believer should learn from God's truth his security and standing in Christ; that he is already a child of God, on the other side of death, in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus; not yet with, but in, Christ Jesus. This being realized, the natural inquiry must be, What is my hope? We reply, The Lord's coming. We do not hope to have everlasting life; for he that believeth hath everlasting life (John 5:24). We do not hope for forgiveness of sins; this also we have now:

In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins (Eph. 1:7).

We do not hope for righteousness; this too we have now; for

Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth (Rom. 10:4).

What, then, do we look for? The inspired reply is,

We look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body (Phil. 3:20-21).

Such are the precious truths of God's Word to which the reader's attention is called in this little volume. It is sent forth, with much conscious infirmity, in dependence on the God of all grace, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Fear Not

And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death. (Revelation 1:17-18).

Every one of us must have to do with the Lord Jesus. Each person will yet come before Him. Nothing can possibly hinder this. The joyful expectation of the Christian is, that he will see his Savior's face and be like Him. Those who are not born again — unbelievers—will assuredly see Jesus too, but not with joy: as a wicked man once said,

I shall see Him, but not now; I shall behold Him, but not nigh (Num. 24:17).

Many persons now turn away from the Savior's name; they like to banish His blessed gospel from their thoughts; but then,

at the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow, in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (see Phil. 2:10-11).

This is God's decree, and it must be accomplished.

The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations (Psa. 33:11).

There is, therefore, no possibility of escape from having to do with Jesus; and I doubt not that those who will go away into everlasting punishment will send up a cry continually from the pit of torment, that Jesus Christ is Lord. This is very solemn, and makes the gospel a matter of such individual application and importance. The Scripture says, "every knee," "every tongue," "every one of us shall give account of himself in the day of judgment!"

Behold, He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see Him (Rev. 1:7)!

plainly showing that men must have to do personally with the Lord Jesus. Now He graciously pardons and saves; then He will righteously condemn, and punish with everlasting destruction. What folly, then, it is to neglect His great salvation!

In these verses of the Revelation we find that John saw the Lord Jesus, and he says,

When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead (Rev. 1:17).

So dazzling and refulgent is the glorified Savior, that even His most intimate and beloved servants, while in the body, cannot catch a glimpse of Him without being overpowered by the brightness of His glory. Perhaps there never was a man on earth who knew such deep intimacy with Jesus as John. We find him with the Lord in the days of His flesh on every remarkable occasion. At the Supper he was the only one of the disciples that leaned on His bosom; and in an anxious moment he only could turn to his loving Master and say,

Lord, who is it? (John 13:25).

And further, when Jesus was betrayed and apprehended, and all others forsook Him, John followed Him into the High Priest's palace, and stood by Him to the last, even at the cross. John, then, must have known very deep intimacy with the Lord, and his writings show how richly the love of God was shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost.

John was also faithful after the Savior left the world. He was transported to the isle of Patmos for his godly life and testimony. It is important to notice that he was banished, not so much for the doctrines he held, as for what he said and did; for in this chapter he tells us that he

was in the isle that is called Patmos for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ (Rev. 1:9).

Most persons around us now have no objection to the outward forms of religion, and will allow you to hold what doctrines you please, provided you keep them to yourself; but the unrenewed mind still kicks against faithful testimony in life and word to the infinite and glorious perfections of the person, work, offices, fitness, and fullness of the Lord Jesus Christ. If Christians now bore distinctly

the testimony of Jesus Christ,

we may be sure that it would still be offensive to many; for the offence of the cross has not ceased.

While John was honoring his earth-rejected Master in desolate Patmos, his Master marvelously honored him. His persecuted and banished apostle was chosen, not only to convey the Revelation to the churches, but to have such blessed views of the future as no one was ever privileged before. This is very sweet to contemplate. Accordingly, we are told that he was

in the Spirit on the Lord's day (Rev. 1:10).

By his being

in the Spirit,

we are to understand that he was not musing or meditating according to the thoughts of the natural mind, but that he was under the guidance, control, and operations of the Holy Spirit; the thoughts of his mind, and the affections of his heart, were according to the workings of the Holy Spirit, the Testifier and Glorifier of Christ. Every believer has the Spirit; but we are not always

in the Spirit.

In this state of mind the beloved apostle suddenly heard behind him a trumpet-like sound so very loud, that he tells us it was

a great voice, as of a trumpet (Rev. 1:10).

The voice said,

I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, &c. (Rev. 1:11).

This was a remarkable sound, which so aroused the dear apostle, that he turned to see the voice that spoke with him; but no sooner had he looked behind him, than a marvelous vision of Christ

and the Churches, resplendent with unheard of glory and beauty, met his astonished eye. He saw the churches symbolized by seven golden candlesticks — costly, pure, precious, heavenly, fitted to bear light; and in the midst of the candlesticks he saw the Lord; but, astounding as the great voice must have been, and beautiful as the appearance of the seven candlesticks must have been, it was neither the one nor the other that so overpowered the apostle, as the sight of Christ Himself —

When I saw HIM, I fell at His feet as dead (Rev. 1:17).

Oh, my reader, it is not being taken up with the Church, or sounds, or sights of any kind, apart from Christ, that really humbles us; but when by faith we feel near the risen Savior, it is this that withers up fleshly pretensions, that exposes the filthiness of creature-righteousness, makes us feel in an atmosphere that breathes holy solemnity into the soul, and gives deep reality of feeling to the heart and conscience. It was when Job was brought to say,

Now mine eye seeth thee (Job 42:5),

that he abhorred himself, and repented in dust and ashes. When Isaiah saw the glory of the Lord, he exclaimed,

Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips (Isa. 6:5).

The beloved Daniel tells us,

When I saw this great vision, there remained no strength in me; for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength (see Dan. 10:8).

The prophet Habakkuk also says,

When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself (Hab. 3:16).

Ah! my reader, be assured that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. In His holy presence our depravity and weakness are made manifest; there we learn that we are really fallen creatures, corrupt, and very unlike Him who is of purer eyes than to behold evil. Here we find that God's balance is infinitely holy, His weights perfectly just, and that, weighed by Him, we are

found wanting (Dan. 5:27).

Oh, that you, dear reader, might be led to consider, not what you are as compared with your neighbours, but what you are before God, and how you will meet the Lord Jesus at His coming!

I say, it was a sight of the Lord Jesus that brought John down

at His feet as dead (Rev. 1:17).

Though he had full assurance that he was born again, that he was a son of God, that all his sins were purged, that he was in-dwelt by the Spirit, and therefore, as to his eternal state, he had nothing to fear; yet the glory of the ascended Lord was more than he could bear while in this body. In a momentary glimpse, John seemed to eye the adorable Lord from head to foot. He tells us, that He was

like unto the Son of man (Rev. 1:13),
and yet He declared Himself to be
the First and the Last (Rev. 1:11).

And in this brief account we find His Person — God and Man — beautifully expressed. Who can
be

the First and the Last,

but the eternal Godhead? and who is

like unto the Son of man,

but He who was in

the likeness of sinful flesh (Rom. 8:3),

and

was found in fashion as a man (see Phil. 2:8)?

We may gather from His being

in the midst of the seven candlesticks (Rev. 1:13),

that He is in Spirit with the Churches, though personally absent.

His eyes,

which once wept tears of sympathy and pity, now,

as a flame of fire (Rev. 1:14),

show us that nothing escapes His observation; He therefore says to every assembly,

I know thy works (Rev. 2:2).

The sharp two-edged sword (Rev. 1:16),

and

His voice as the sound of many waters (Rev. 1:15),

may teach us that He judges and reproves; while the

garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle (Rev. 1:13),

may remind us that He is not now mocked with a purple robe, nor is His sacred bosom now
exposed to the rude centurion's spear; but that He is girded for the service of judging the
assemblies.

We may learn, perhaps, from

His head and His hairs white like wool, as white as snow (Rev. 1:14),

that He is the I AM, perfect in purity and spotlessness. The

seven stars in His right hand (Rev. 1:16)

may teach us that He is the source, the upholder, and sovereign controller of all ministry in His Church, and that it all flows from the hand that was pierced on Calvary's cross; while

His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace (Rev. 1:15),

may teach us that though He was crucified through weakness, when His foot were nailed to the tree, yet that now all judgment is committed unto Him, He will tread

the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God (Rev. 19:15),

and that

He must reign till He hath put all enemies under His feet (1 Cor. 15:25).

And what can

His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength (Rev. 1:16)

set before us, but that He who once condescended to be spit upon and smitten for us, whose visage was

marred more than any man (Isa. 52:14),

is now the exalted Head of the Church, Head too of all principality and power, and in the full enjoyment of the glory which He had with the Father before the world was?

"The head that once was crown'd with thorns

Is crown'd with glory now;

Heaven's royal diadem adorns

The mighty victor's brow."

What a glorious sight of the Lord had John! and though it so affected him as to bring him

as dead (Rev. 1:17)

at His feet, nevertheless he afterwards found that the feet of Jesus was the place of honor and blessing; and this is not the only instance in the New Testament. When the Lord Jesus appeared to Saul, and arrested him in his persecuting zeal by a glorious manifestation of Himself, it at once brought him prostrate on the earth. He says,

Suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. And I fell unto the ground (Acts 22:6-7).

But though blinded with the glorious light, humbled at the feet of Jesus, and crying out to Him whom he had so blasphemed, and whose members he had so persecuted,

What shall I do, Lord? (Acts 22:10)

nevertheless, he found the feet of Jesus the place of rich and abundant blessing even for the chief of sinners. The Lord said unto him,

Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do (Acts 22:10).

Oh, that the Spirit of God might now show sinners that the feet of Jesus is the place of blessing!

Peter is another witness of the same thing. He was fishing with his companions in the lake of Gennesaret. For many an hour he had been casting his net in vain. At last Jesus entered the ship; and when He had finished preaching, He prayed Peter to launch out into the deep, and let down the net for another draught. Peter appears to have thought it would be of little use, because he had toiled all night without success; however, as he had been requested to do so, he did it, when the multitude of fishes was so great that the net brake. This circumstance seems to have led Peter into the understanding that the person who had thus commanded him to let down the net was the Lord; and, humbled under a sense of His amazing condescension and power, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying,

Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord (Luke 5:8)!

Observe, that Peter fell down as a sinful man; he felt so vile, and so unfit for the Lord's company, that he could only bow down before Him as a sinner. But how did Jesus reply? Did He say, You are such a sinner, you shall depart from me? No. You have sinned so much that I cannot receive you? No. If you will promise to do better for the future, I will pardon the past? Oh, no! but Peter found by happy experience, in thus casting himself at Jesus' feet as a poor guilty sinner, just as he was, that there was grace in the heart of Jesus to abound over all his sin. Jesus said unto him,

Fear not!

as much as to say, I welcome, pardon, cleanse, and save you; and more than this, you shall be honored in my service;

from henceforth thou shalt catch men (Luke 5:10).

Oh, what grace there is for self-abased sinners at the Savior's feet!

"The moment a sinner believes,

And trusts in the crucified Lord,

His pardon at once he receives,

Salvation in full through His blood."

Let us look at another instance. A woman who was notorious for her sinful ways heard that Jesus had visited the city, and was sitting at meat in the house of Simon the Pharisee. She felt the burden of her sins; her conscience was oppressed with guilt; her heart was sad. She needed a Savior, and He was near at hand. But will He save such a sinner? Can He welcome such a notoriously evil person? Will He who is so holy deign to listen to such a vile creature? Such might have been the reasonings of her distressed heart. Nevertheless, necessity compelled her to go to Jesus. She stood at His feet behind Him weeping, and began to wash His feet with tears, and did

wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed His feet, and anointed them with ointment. Here we find another troubled soul, a conscience-stricken sinner, at the feet of Jesus. And what did the Lord say to her? Did He give her one upbraiding look? Did one reproachful word escape His lips? Oh, no; for He came

not to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved (see John 3:17).

He came to seek and to save that which was lost (see Luke 19:10).

He came into the world to save sinners (see 1 Tim. 1:15).

Jesus therefore said unto her,

Thy faith hath saved thee (Luke 7:50).

Oh, how blessedly do the Savior and sinner meet together! How welcome are such to the gracious heart of Jesus! How happy for the sinner to be thus received! There is nothing here between the guilty sinner and the gracious Savior; no ordinances, no ceremonial observances, no official interferences; but simply the guilty penitent confessing, and the Son of God forgiving. And the same who had said to another,

Thy sins be forgiven thee (Matt. 9:2),

now openly declared,

Thy faith,

not thine ointment, thy tears, nor thy kiss, acceptable fruits though they were, but

Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace (Luke 7:50).

Now let us look again at John.

When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead.

The beloved apostle, being thus at his Master's feet, was now in a position to learn still deeper lessons of the Savior's love. John says,

He laid His right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not (Rev. 1:17)!

What a blessed manifestation of the compassionate heart of Jesus! How tender, how gentle, was the touch! That same right hand that had gotten eternal victory over His servant's enemies was now again put forth on his behalf; that hand which had been once willingly pierced for his sins was again stretched out for his recovery, at the same time comforting His fainting servant with

Fear not;

as much as to say, John, you have nothing to fear, no ground for discomfort, no warrant for uneasy apprehensions; for my right hand is for you, and not against you. If He who has; all power in heaven and in earth, the Creator of the ends of the earth, the Redeemer, and Judge of all, says,

Fear not,

what ground can there be for disquietude?

But, more than this, the Master will give His fainting servant yet more intelligent reasons for not fearing, because of His person, finished work, and exaltation.

1. HIS PERSON.

I am the First and the Last (Rev. 1:17).

We have already referred to this. It may be well to add, that true peace must always be connected with right views of the person of Christ, because it is the dignity and glory of His person that give efficacy to His work. Take away His manhood, and we have no Substitute — no Redeemer; take away His Godhead, and we have no atoning virtue in the blood. The blessedness is, that both God and man are found in Him. Thus He was fitted for the stupendous work of eternal redemption. He was the Days-man, that brought in all the blessing man needed, and answered all that God righteously demanded. This is another reason why John should

Fear not.

2. HIS FINISHED WORK.

I am He that liveth, and was dead (Rev. 1:18).

As much as to say, John, I have died for you. I have borne all your sins, and removed all your transgressions from you. I have been into death instead of you, so that you shall never see death. I am alive again; therefore all your debt is cancelled, all just claims upon you as a sinner have been answered by me; and I am alive again; therefore you must live for ever.

Fear not.

3. HIS EXALTATION.

Behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death (Rev. 1:18).

Unless every one of our sins had been purged, God could not have raised Christ from the dead. His resurrection, therefore, is God's public testimony that sin has been condemned, and for ever put away; and the risen Lord being exalted to the right hand of God, crowned with glory and honor, appointed a Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec, invested with all power, and having all judgment committed to Him, are abundant proofs of the acceptance and security of all believers. And as to death and the grave, Who holds the keys? Did not Jesus say to His servant at His feet, faint, behold your risen and exalted Savior! Think of His person; consider His finished work upon the cross; behold Him triumphing over all your enemies in resurrection; contemplate Him justly exalted in heaven to the highest pinnacle of glory as your life, ever living to make intercession for you, and see Him securely holding the keys of hell and of death. Precious, glorious facts!

"The Savior lives no more to die;

He lives our Head enthroned on high;

He lives triumphant o'er the grave;

He lives eternally to save!

He lives to still His people's fears;

He lives to wipe away their tears;

He lives their mansions to prepare;

He lives to bring them safely there.”

Dear reader! sooner or later you must have to do with the Lord Jesus! Will it be as a Savior, or as a Judge? Will He say to you, Come, ye blessed? or, Depart, ye cursed? Will you bow your knee to Him with joy in heaven; or with weeping in hell? Now He says,

Whosoever will, let Him take the water of life freely (Rev. 22:17).

Then He will say,

Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh. . . . Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord (Prov. 1:24-29).

I have the keys of hell and of death?

What a comforting truth this is to the child of God! How impossible that one can sleep in death, or be laid in the grave, till Jesus unlocks the gates; and we may be assured He will open the gates for His loved ones at the best time, and it shall be neither too soon nor too late — neither shall the way be too easy nor too painful. How wonderfully does the heart of Jesus provide comfort for His fainting servant at His feet! How very sweetly He took away his fears! Oh, Christian reader! if you are almost ready to

Jesus Making Whole; or, the Woman in the Crowd

“And Jesus went with him; and much people followed him, and thronged him. And a certain woman, which had an issue of blood twelve years, and had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse, when she had heard of Jesus, came in the press behind, and touched his garment. For she said, If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole. And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague. And Jesus, immediately knowing in himself that virtue had gone out of him, turned him about in the press, and said, Who touched my clothes? And his disciples said unto him, Thou seest the multitude thronging thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me? And he looked round about to see her that had done this thing. But the woman fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth. And he said unto her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague” (Mark 5:24-34).

There was remarkable simplicity in the ways of Jesus. His words also were full of deep doctrine, and the more we meditate on them, under the teaching of the Holy Ghost, the more we shall be convinced of the profound truth often embodied in them. His heart was always as full of grace when He walked up and down this earth doing good, as when he died upon the cross; and oh! how blessed it is to trace Him in the various incidents recorded in the gospels, and to contemplate the exceeding rich and abundant grace that He manifested! it is wonderful that Christ — the only begotten of the Father — should ever have been seen in this world of sin, except in fiery judgment; but to find Him leaving the heights of glory and bliss, to come into this evil world to save sinners, is surpassingly wonderful.

In the Scripture for our consideration we find that Jesus was in the midst of a crowd of persons. We are told that

much people followed Him (Mark 5:24).

Thousands, probably, surrounded Him. Apostles were there, and Jairus, one of the rulers of the synagogue, was there also; but most of those who pressed and thronged Him came only to see His miracles, and to be partakers of His temporal bounty in the loaves.

It must have been deeply interesting to behold a man heal the sick, cast out devils, cleanse the lepers, and raise the dead to life. There was something attractive to the natural senses in seeing such miraculous power put forth. Jesus had just before cast out many devils from a man, and was on his way to a ruler's house to raise his dead child to life. There was, I say, something deeply interesting in all this. People liked to see such wonderful works. They thus made Jesus an object of interest to their minds; but, lamentable to say, they knew Him not as their Savior. They did not regard Him as the Redeemer of the lost, but as a worker of miracles. They knew Him only as an object of present interest, but not as the author of

eternal salvation (Heb. 5:9).

This is very solemn; but, I ask, are not the same principles at work now? Is there not a vast religious crowd all around us? Are not multitudes making Christian religion, as they call it, a subject of interest and conversation, without knowing Christ crucified as their Savior? It is astonishing how many people in this and other countries like to be accounted Christians. If English people go to the land of Hottentots, or to idolatrous India or China, do they not generally wish to be considered Christians? Oh, my reader, beware of any religion that comes short of present forgiveness of sins, and eternal salvation through the finished work of Christ! Do not rest, I beseech you, until you can truthfully say, "Christ has cleansed me from all my sins, and I am in Him."

The crowd that surrounded Jesus cared little for Him, because they knew nothing of His person and work; and the mass of people operated rather as a hindrance to a sin-convicted, helpless one coming to Jesus. So it is now. Who, I ask, are the great hinderers of the gospel in our day? Are they not those persons who make a religious profession without a vital acquaintance with Christ Himself? those who are content to hear about Christ, without having received Christ in their hearts as their salvation? Are not nominal Christians the very persons who cry out against brokenness of heart, repentance, the new birth, and present forgiveness of sins? But, blessed be God! whatever apparent hindrances there may be to souls coming to Jesus, His eternal purpose must stand; and a living faith in a living Savior allows nothing to hinder it from that object, which is felt to be of such pressing necessity and eternal importance — Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

There was one person in the midst of this crowd of people in whose heart the Holy Spirit was effectually working, and, as far as we know, she was the only one. So it has often been, and still is. Hundreds and thousands crowd to hear the gospel, but the heart of one only may be opened to receive it.

In the narrative we are considering there are two points which I desire, as the Lord may graciously help, to make a few remarks upon.

1. The work of the Spirit in the soul of the woman; and
2. The way of Christ with this sinner.

I. THE SPIRIT'S WORK IN THE WOMAN. When the Holy Ghost takes a soul in hand, He teaches effectually. He uncovers the filthy rags of self-righteousness, exposes the rotten patches of self-reformation, and gives us a true knowledge of our state before God. He is the Spirit of Truth. He convinces of sin. He lays bare the heart by so applying the written word as to show its desperate wickedness in the light of God's holy presence. He fastens upon the conscience the vile workings, unclean thoughts, desires, and intents of the heart.

"He never leads a man to say,

Thank God, I'm made so good;

But turns his eye another way —

To Jesus and His blood."

Ah, my reader, it is very solemn and humiliating to be under the Holy Spirit's convicting power. He makes us feel that we are lost and undone, and shows us that every human resource is only a sandy foundation. He makes us sensible of the fact, that the all- searching eye of God is upon us, that He knows us thoroughly, and justly pronounces us to be unrighteous, unholy, and unclean before Him.

Now look at the woman. She not only felt that she had a disease, but that it was incurable — that no earthly resource, no human means, could heal her. She had long tried various expedients, and knew what it was to

suffer many things (see Mark 5:26)

until she had

spent all her living (Luke 8:43);

but the end proved that

she was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse (Mark 5:26).

Thus all help failed, all hope was gone. She felt that her condition was hopeless, helpless, and incurably bad. Blessed picture of the Spirit's work in the soul, though a humbling and painful process for the proud heart to pass through!

Most people around us know that they are sinners. Ask whom you will, the answer is, "I know I am a sinner." But when the Spirit of God works in the heart, He teaches men that they are lost sinners, hell- deserving sinners, helpless, and guilty sinners before God. Many who say that they are sinners, do not mean that they are born in sin, full of sin, dead in sins, children of wrath. It is because people do not know their real state that they, like the woman, try this or that expediency, vainly hoping to make themselves better. They go here and there, leave off some old habits, put on a measure of outward sanctity, break through certain long-accustomed ways, and adopt other lines of pursuit; hoping in this way to commend themselves to the favour of God, and procure ease of conscience. Many a man, when he knows that he has transgressed against God's law, endeavours to atone for it by outward reformation, blindly thinking that there is some ability in himself so to act for the future as to conceal the past. But we may be sure, that if the Spirit of God is working in their souls, they will feel

nothing bettered

by these things, but that they

rather grow worse (Mark 5:26);

for the Holy Spirit will so open up to them the desperate wickedness and deceitfulness of their hearts, that, after all their carnal contrivances, they will feel the plague of sin worse than before.

Oh, my reader, if you are trying to make yourself better, if you are going about to establish your own righteousness, thinking to commend yourself to God by anything of your own, may you now see the folly of it, and solemnly feel the truth that you are a lost sinner in the sight of God! Do not any longer be content to form one of the religious crowd around us, the church-going,

chapel-going multitude, who pass by repentance and the new birth, and yet presume to take Christian ground; but may you turn to the Lord Jesus, who is exalted to be a Prince and a Savior, to give repentance and remission of sins.

It appears from the Scripture record, that this woman, in her sad condition, heard of one who could cure her.

She had heard of Jesus (Mark 5:27)

— she heard that He could do what men could not do.

What blessed intelligence for a poor disconsolate soul! How welcome were the tidings! She felt her plague; she had proved the failing of every human prescription; she had

spent all (Mark 5:26),

and was worse than ever. Now how did she treat the report? Did she hear, and not act? No. She came to Jesus. Oh, yes; the Spirit of God leads the soul straight to Jesus. He reveals to the sin-stricken soul Jesus crucified as a present and an eternal salvation. The woman was thoroughly convinced that Jesus, and Jesus only, could heal her. It was not the venerable Jairus, nor even ordained apostles, that she felt she needed; only JESUS, for she knew that He could heal her, and He only. Her faith beheld Him in the midst of the vast crowd, like an overflowing fountain of living water, and she felt she must drink or die. She said within herself,

If I may touch but His clothes, I shall be whole (Mark 5:28).

She was sure there was virtue in Jesus, and that it flowed freely to the touch of faith, and have it she must. Her necessity was most urgent and imperative. Neither the press of people, nor anything else, could hinder her making her way through the crowd, till she touched His garment, and had the healing virtue. She knew Christ as the giver, And she came simply as a needy receiver — she touched His garment. How blessed is this sample of faith! What discrimination was wrought in her soul, by the Spirit of God, between crowding around Jesus, and the touch of faith! Now, mark the result. She felt that she was healed of that plague.

Before we proceed further, let us seek to apply this. We tell you, dear reader, of Jesus the Son of God, who came into the world to save sinners. We present to you His death as the Sin-bearer upon the tree; for

He died the Just for the unjust, to bring us to God (see 1 Pet. 3:18).

We testify of His blood; for the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin. Dear reader, Jesus only can save you from the wrath to come, and He can save to the uttermost. All Scripture points thus to Jesus. God the Father draws sinners to Jesus. Jesus Himself says to the heavy laden sinner,

Come unto me, . . . and I will give you rest (Matt. 11:28).

The Holy Spirit leads the convicted sinner to Jesus. The gospel declares there is salvation in no other. Your state as a sinner is incurably bad. You are lost. You now hear of Jesus, that blessed Savior who came to seek and to save the lost. God commands this good news to be published.

How do you treat this blessed report? Do you come to Jesus to save you! You have just seen that many crowded around Jesus, but only the touch of faith got virtue out of Him. It is not merely hearing of Jesus, or reading about Jesus, or talking about Jesus, that will save you. No; those taught of the Spirit of God know that they must perish for ever, except they come to Jesus to be cleansed by His precious blood. Oh, my reader, Jesus delighteth in mercy! Though He sits on heaven's throne, His eye discerns your inmost thoughts, and His ear can welcome the feeblest cry. He knows how thoroughly sinful you are, and still He says,

Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out (John 6:37).

Be assured that He will not be indifferent to your case, if you desire His salvation. The Father will run to meet you when you are a great way off, and then you will feel happier than you ever did before. You will know Jesus as the One who put away your sins, by the blood of His cross, who was brought again from the dead by the blood of the everlasting covenant, and who entered into heaven itself by His own blood. Be assured, dear reader, that as soon as your troubled, sin-sick soul looks to the atoning death of Jesus, believing God's testimony to the value of that blood, you will feel whole of your plague; for you will see that Jesus bare your sins, and put them away for ever, under the judgment of God, by His death upon the cross. You will then no longer dread the wrath of God, but will enjoy peace in His holy presence, and be able to sing

"He ransomed me from hell with blood,
And by His power my foes controlled;
He found me wandering far from God,
And brought me to His chosen fold."

2. CONSIDER THE WAY OF JESUS WITH THIS SINNER. It was a serious moment with the woman, as well as a precious occasion for the outflowing of the love of Him who was full of grace and truth. Jesus was on His way to the ruler's house, whose daughter was said to be at the point of death (Mark 5:23).

But the case of this one needy woman was such a weighty matter, that Jesus called the attention of the whole multitude to it. She came behind Him to touch His clothes; but with what gracious majesty did the blessed Lord turn Himself about in the press and say,

Who touched me? (Mark 5:31).

It is blessed to contemplate these ways of the Lord. A sinner had proved the healing virtue of Jesus, and the attention of the whole crowd must be arrested, and the urgent journey must be interrupted for the moment, while the heart of this trembling one is established and comforted, and her Christ-glorifying testimony published.

Who touched my clothes? (Mark 5:30)

said the tender-hearted Jesus. Thus the believing sinner was singled out from among the thousands; for her soul must be farther taught the deep and everlasting intimacy with the Son of God, which she had by faith been brought into. She must be made to feel that her place is not now

to be behind the Lord, but to stand before Him in perfect confidence and unclouded affection. Ah, my reader, when Jesus is made known, in the healing virtue of His blood, to any sin-sick soul, an eternal intimacy is begun, and Jesus will show, as He did this woman, something of the dignity and blessing that His own grace has brought us into. He will make us know the things that are freely given to us of God. He will say,

Thou art mine (Isa. 43:1).

I will never leave thee, &c. (Heb. 13:5).

I will uphold and bless thee, &c. (see Isa. 41:10)

The needy woman had secretly come behind Jesus; but He will have her now stand publicly before Him. There must be dealing with Jesus, and learning the lessons of His healing grace in secret, before any can truly confess Him before men. Jesus turned Himself about in the press; His voice was heard by her; His loving eye singled her out among the crowd of thousands, and the woman fell down before Him, and with a grateful heart told Him all the truth

before all the people (Luke 8:47).

With fear and trembling, I grant, as we all feel when we first leave the long-accustomed ranks of unbelief, and openly plant our feet beneath the earth-despised shelter of Immanuel's grace.

Oh, my reader, see what an important matter in the mind of heaven is the salvation of one soul! Jesus rejoices over one lost sheep when it is found! The Father runs to meet one returning prodigal! The Holy Spirit often seems to pass by crowds to comfort one poor brokenhearted soul! There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth! How blessed this is!

But notice another thing. Jesus holds up before the multitude the faith of this one woman who had so honored Him. He receives her worship, confesses His acceptance of her, and proclaims the new and everlasting relationship subsisting between them. Jesus calls her

Daughter (Mark 5:34).

This title showed her new relationship to God.

Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26).

Beloved, now are we the sons of God (1 John 3:2).

It is this that the Spirit of God now bears witness to in the consciences of believers.

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God (Rom. 8:16).

Christian reader! do you know your sonship? It is not a mere honorary title, like many distinctions of this world, but a new and eternal relationship which God in Christ has brought us into.

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God (1 John 3:1)!

Yes; believers in Christ Jesus are sons by choice, by regeneration, and by adoption.

Jesus also told her that she was made whole, and that by faith —

Thy faith hath made thee whole (Mark 5:34).

She had confessed the Lord

before all the people (Luke 8:47);

but that had not made her whole. It is important to see that it is not our tears, our sorrows, our reformations, or efforts of any kind that make us whole. No; it is Christ, and Christ alone. Scripture always directs us to the blood of Christ for peace, and it also assures us that

whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins (Acts 10:43).

Jesus had made this woman whole. Virtue had gone out of Him. Jesus assured her that the healing was perfect — she was made whole. Yes; Jesus is the Rock, and His work is perfect. He receives returning, sinful prodigals. He cleanses and justifies them by His blood, sends His Spirit into their hearts, and assures them they shall not come into condemnation, but that they have passed from death unto life.

The last words of Jesus to the woman are very emphatic —

Go in peace (Mark 5:34).

The first is a remarkable word — “Go.” I often think of it. Some persons never seem to learn its force in their experience. They may be sincere believers, but they are always hanging about Christ with doubts, not knowing forgiveness of sins and present peace; they are constantly asking to be made whole, hoping to be pardoned, &c., when Christ says to them, You are forgiven: “Go.” They do not credit the glorious truth of present forgiveness and liberty of sonship; they are, therefore, in bondage and fear. Jesus would have it otherwise. He says,

Thy faith hath SAVED thee; go in peace???(Luke 7:50)!

As much as to say, Have no more doubts, fears, or misgivings; you are made whole, pardoned, reconciled, a child of God, a sinner saved.

Go in peace.

Dear reader, if you are a believer in the Lord Jesus, take your right place before God and before men as saved! Wherever you go, go in peace as to your salvation, knowing that Christ has removed your transgressions from you as far as the east is from the west; and your sins and iniquities, God says, He will remember no more.

Perhaps one of my readers may be saying, “Am I pardoned?” “Are my sins forgiven?” Important questions indeed. Be persuaded, my friend, and take your right place before God as a guilty sinner; turn away from every other refuge, and come straight to Jesus, and to Jesus only, for salvation. Trust only in His death. Behold Him bearing sin in His own body on the tree, and the fierce wrath of Jehovah poured out upon His Son, because of the sins that were laid upon Him. Then hear God’s testimony:

God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

Believing God's record of the value of the cross of Christ for your salvation, He warrants your saying, "I am God's child. Jesus hath atoned for my sins; with His stripes I am healed."

Oh, my reader! what will become of you if you die without Christ? Is it not written,

He that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him (John 3:36)?

Oh, think of this, I earnestly beseech you! You are full of sin. You now hear of Jesus as the only Savior of sinners. How do you treat Him? Do you come to Him to save you, or do you despise Him?

Remember that when the woman in the crowd heard of Jesus, she came to Him to heal her, never rested till she touched Him, and you have read the happy result. Woe, woe unto you, if you neglect this great salvation! How can you escape the eternal torment of the damned, if you continue to set at naught God's gospel? Oh, poor sinner! didst thou but feel thy guilt and danger, how wouldst thou flee to the outstretched arms of the loving Jesus, and long to feel the cleansing virtue of His blood!

"Fly, then, awakened sinner, fly!

Your case admits no stay;

The fountain's opened now for sin –

Come, wash your guilt away.

"Only by faith in Jesu's blood

The sinner gets release;

No other sacrifice for sin

Will God accept but this."

Gospel Liberty

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” (Gal. 5:1).

Those addressed in this epistle had known the liberty of the gospel. A person must first have tasted liberty before he can truly be exhorted to

stand fast

in it. You could not say to a poor slave working in chains, Stand fast in liberty. No; he must first be set free. So it is spiritually. Many do not know gospel liberty. Some are so accustomed to the slavery of sin, that they are not conscious of the real bondage they are in; others have, more or less, a feeling sense of the miserable condition of their hearts and ways, and long for deliverance from guilt and fear. Other persons seem only to think of liberty and independence in relation to their fellow-men. Perhaps they have striven for it, and have in some measure realized it; but they know nothing of the glorious liberty of the children of God. The Son of God came down from heaven to make men free. He preached liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound. He gave His life a ransom for many.

It is delightful to see Paul's disinterested, Christ-like love and care for these Galatian saints. When first he went and preached among them, they received him as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus; they felt great blessing through his ministrations, and loved him so much, that if it had been possible, they would have plucked out their own eyes, and have given them to him. They were happy in the Lord. To them Christ was all. But after Paul left, false teachers came in among them — persons who cared not for the people's souls, but only to propagate certain points of erroneous doctrine. The Galatian converts received them, and were so injured that they counted Paul their enemy. But how did Paul treat them? Did he return evil for evil? No. Like his blessed Master, he only sought their welfare, and cared very little what they thought of him, provided they thought well of Christ. He therefore presented Christ to them in the richest and most attractive way, so that they might be brought to be happy again in the knowledge and enjoyment of Christ's finished work. Most blessed is it to consider that

salvation is of the Lord (Jonah 2:9),

and that God's only way of meeting man in blessing is by the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. We may well pity those who are seeking satisfaction from creature-streams, instead of the Creator's fullness; or who may be endeavouring to get into favour with God by any other way than by receiving His amazing mercy to sinners in the death of His beloved Son. God's gracious testimony to man is,

I will have mercy, and not sacrifice (Matt. 9:13);

thus plainly teaching us that the only way by which He can make man happy, and deliver him from eternal condemnation, is by compassionating him in his helplessness and sins, and providing a full

and everlasting salvation for him, without money and without price. This, known in the soul, is liberty. This is what the Spirit of God bears witness to; and

where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty (2 Cor. 3:17).

This alone gives confidence and substantial comfort. It flows from God to the sinner.

God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8).

It is man, sinful man, God so loves. Man's condition before God is that of a sinner — all have sinned (Rom. 3:23).

He is a slave of Satan, a servant of sin, a breaker of God's laws, afraid of death; he knows nothing of the holy presence of God, and trembles at the sound of the Lord's return from heaven. Such are we all by nature. In this fallen condition God's pitying eye beheld us, His compassionate heart moved toward us; and knowing that His own Son, sent forth in the likeness of sinful flesh, and making atonement by the death of the cross, was the only way of redeeming man, and bringing him into liberty and blessing, in richest mercy this unspeakable gift was not withheld. God gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Thus Christ went down into the sorrows and death of the cross to exalt sinful man to the heights of eternal glory.

Let us now look into the nature of the liberty the apostle here refers to, when he exhorts the Galatian saints to

stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free (Gal. 5:1).

And I think we shall find that Christ has procured liberty from the slavery of Satan, from the guilt and dominion of sin, from the bondage and curse of the law, from the fear of death, and given us liberty in God's presence, the liberty of sonship, and liberty to serve.

1. LIBERTY FROM THE SLAVERY OF SATAN. It is a very humiliating thought, that man is really the slave of Satan; but is it not an undeniable fact, that we are the servants of those to whom we render obedience? Who, then, does man obey? Does he obey God? Certainly not; for the testimony of an inspired prophet is,

All we like sheep have gone astray (Isa. 53:6);

and the testimony of the Holy Ghost by an apostle is,

There is NONE that doeth good, no, not one — they are ALL gone out of the way — there is NONE that seeketh after God, &c. (Rom. 3:11, 12).

Who, then, does the natural man obey? Is it not the prince of this world, who is also called the god of this world? Saddening thought! but, alas! too true;

for all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world (1 John 2:16).

The changeable fashions, the fascinating pleasures, and carnal gratifications of the day, in whatever garb they may be clothed, are of the world, and therefore in direct connection with the deceiver of the world, the adversary of souls — the wicked one, in whom the whole world lieth. The lusts and passions of fallen man easily submit to his subtle suggestions, and those who yield often find present sensual recompense. But this arch-enemy deceives and blinds, lest the glorious gospel should shine into their hearts. Jesus, however, came to destroy the works of the devil, to free men from this vile service, to redeem His people from all iniquity, to ransom them from the power of the grave, to destroy death, and him that hath the power of death, that is, the devil. Man had fallen into allegiance to Satan, and he was fast bound by his chains; but a stronger than Satan came to his help; the Almighty Savior came forth from the Father to his rescue, and by His death, and resurrection from the dead, He led captivity captive, and triumphed over principalities and powers. Thus Christ, by one offering, which He once offered, ransomed His people. As nothing less than His precious blood could redeem them from the dreadful bondage they were in, Jesus paid that amazing price for them. All who believe in His name are made free. Christ has procured their liberty from the slavery of Satan. They now love and serve Him.

2. LIBERTY FROM THE GUILT AND DOMINION OF SIN. Some people say, they are thankful that they never felt a guilty conscience; but I pity such. It is the clearest proof of their being still in their sins. I thank God that I have felt the plague of a guilty conscience, dreadful as the experience of it was; but I can also say that I have a cleansed conscience by the blood of Christ. How can any one know pardon and peace, who never felt condemnation and guilt? The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. Why do not persons feel guilt? Because they do not consider what they are in God's sight. They have, therefore, wrong thoughts about sin. They say that many things are not sin which really are. They do not believe that, from the sole of the foot even unto the head, there is no soundness, and that there is none that doeth good, no, not one; but whatever be man's thought of himself, the Divine sentence has gone forth, that all the world stand

guilty before God (Rom. 3:19).

Now, Jesus came to give us deliverance from this dreadful guilt, and this He did by the death of the cross. There God made Him to be sin for us; our old man was crucified with Him; there our iniquities were laid upon Him; He was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities; there all the waves and billows of Jehovah's wrath passed over Him; thus Christ, by the infinite efficacy of His one sacrifice, hath freed us from the guilt of sin. Not only have our sins been judged on Him on the tree, but

our old man (Rom. 6:6)

too — the nature that did the sins — the corrupt tree, as well as its fruits.

Thus, through Christ, we have power over sin. Before a sinner has beheld the Lamb of God slain on Calvary, sin has dominion over him. He makes resolutions; but he breaks them again and again. He reforms outwardly in various ways; but he only exchanges one class of sins for another. He is without strength. He cannot live without sinning. But when his guilty conscience is brought by the Holy Spirit before the cross of Christ, his heart melts, the thorns and briers of self-righteousness are burned up, his icy affections thaw before the burning love of Immanuel, and he is humbled before God, broken down under a sense of His love. By considering the deep

agonies of the Sin- bearer, he hates sin, he loathes himself, loves the Savior, and cries out, with gratitude of soul —

“Love so amazing, so divine,

Demands my heart, my life, my all!”

Thus, by faith in the Son of God, who died for the ungodly, we have liberty from the dominion of sin; and the Divine assurance is,

Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace (Rom. 6:14).

3. LIBERTY FROM THE BONDAGE AND CURSE OF THE LAW. The law of Moses is described by Peter as a yoke of bondage, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear. It made righteous and holy demands on fallen, helpless sinners. It gave no liberty, but the spirit of fear and bondage. It was the ministration of condemnation and death. There was remembrance of sin, but no remission. Man needs power, and he needs life; then obedience readily flows into its proper channel. Jesus by His death bore the curse of a broken law, and put away sin; hence the gospel proclaims full forgiveness; and the testimony of God now is,

Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more (Heb. 10:17).

By Christ all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses (see Acts 13:39).

This is liberty indeed! But who could attentively contemplate God's law without being conscious of having broken it, of having come short of His holy standard, and therefore of being under the curse? for it is written,

Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them (Gal. 3:10).

Who can bear to weigh himself in this balance? This makes it clear that all are under sin. Hence the apostle declares, that

as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse (Gal. 3:10).

We have all, then, merited God's curse by breaking His law; but Jesus, the Redeemer, came forth and rescued us:

Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree (Gal. 3:13).

Thus we have full liberty and redemption from the bondage and curse of the law by the cross of Christ.

“The law proclaims no terror now,

And Sinai's thunders roar no more;

From all His wounds new blessings flow,

A sea of joy without a shore.”

4. LIBERTY FROM THE FEAR OF DEATH. Man trembles at death; his bones shake, the joints of his back are loosed, and his countenance becomes ghastly, when he sees death enter the room, and feels its chilly grasp. There is only one thing that enables the soul to triumph in death; it is knowing that Christ died for our sins, and that He who is now in the glory is our life. It is only beholding Christ who was on the cross that will enable any one to say, that death is but the opening of the golden gates that admit him into the celestial glory. Nothing can remove the fear of death, and enable us to meet it with composure and peace, but the sheltering power of the blood of the Lamb, the blessed knowledge that we have passed from death unto life, and the assurance, that though the mortal body may fall asleep in Jesus, death can have no claim upon us, because Jesus hath borne death and judgment instead of us. So that the true language of faith is,

O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:55-57).

Thus we have liberty from the fear of death.

5. LIBERTY IN GOD'S PRESENCE. So perfectly have our old man (Rom. 6:6)

and all our transgressions been judged by God on His beloved Son on the cross, and so completely are we made the righteousness of God in Him risen and ascended, that the believer is enabled, with holy boldness, to draw near to God in the happy liberty of acceptance and favour in His presence. He is now made nigh. Oh, it is wonderful how near to God the believer is brought in Christ Jesus, and by His blood! As near to God as Christ is, because he is in Him. He is invited to come boldly to the throne of grace, both for pity and help, because Christ's all-cleansing blood and His all-prevailing priesthood ever speak there for him. But I must pass on to notice —

6. LIBERTY OF SONSHIP. The Spirit of adoption is one of the most blessed privileges of this dispensation. It seemed necessary that Christ should die before the blessed liberty of sonship could be enjoyed.

When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father (Gal. 4:4-6).

Thus we see that it is through the death of Christ we are brought into the blessed standing of sons. We realize and enjoy this precious truth by faith.

Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26).

It is a blessing of the highest possible dignity, and is our present portion.

Beloved, now are we the sons of God (1 John 3:2).

It is when this truth is known with power in the soul that we are enabled to serve our heavenly Father acceptably. It will not be from slavish fear, like the spirit of bondage under the law; but it will be with reverence and filial fear, lest we grieve the heart of our gracious Father. How blessed is

this liberty! How full of comfort! How rich in goodness now! How sweet the prospect of standing for ever before the Father in love, as the objects of His choice, adoption, and grace!

7. LIBERTY OF SERVICE. The believer is a servant, because he is a son; and the Lord's service is perfect freedom —

His yoke is easy, and His burden is light (see Matt. 11:30).

He serves God as a redeemed sinner and an adopted child, constrained by the love of Christ. He works not for liberty, but as having liberty; not for life, but from life. This is happy service; it flows from a cheerful heart; it is wrought by a willing spirit; and is often accompanied with present recompense. There are no cares, no burdens, connected with such service; it aims only at one object, namely, to exalt Him who ransomed us with His own blood; and we know that His blood purges our conscience from dead works to serve the living God, and to wait for His Son from heaven.

But more than all this. We have liberty to trust in Him at all times; to cast all our care upon Him; to rejoice in the Lord alway; and to pray without ceasing. We can sit by faith at His pierced feet; we can there seek instruction, and hear His word, in the blessed consciousness that those feet at which we sit tell us of atonement made, and the captive soul set free. We may lean upon His arm, while passing through the wilderness, in the happy remembrance that it was once willingly stretched out for us on Calvary's cross — once bound to that accursed tree, to make us eternally free. We can rest our way-worn hearts by faith upon His wounded bosom, in the sweetest assurance that from His side flowed blood and water — the blessed and certain testimony of the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and of the perfect love and favour of our unchanging God.

As I have said before, all do not enjoy this liberty in their souls; but it is, nevertheless, the privilege of those who believe in the Lord Jesus for salvation, because it is based on what has been already accomplished; it is liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free. The doubting, trembling soul, therefore, need only look to the cross of Christ, and heartily receive God's own account of the value of that work, to be happy. Is there a question in any soul about sin? — the only remedy is the death of Christ. If a sense of having broken God's law oppress the heart, look at the redeeming work of His beloved Son. If the fear of death fetter any spirit, the only delivering power is the death of Jesus on the cross. If the soul feel at a distance from God, the only way of returning to His presence is by the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. If a sluggish feeling seem to hinder our going forward in service, the value of the sacrifice of Christ, apprehended by faith, revives and strengthens. If darkness becloud the mind, and a sense of sin lie upon the conscience, communion and peace are restored by confession, and believing what God says about the blood.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9);

and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin (1 John 1:9).

Dear Christian reader, what say you to these things? Can you rejoice in this blessed liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free? or are you fearing, and doubting, and trembling as to your eternal prospects? If so, why is it? Have you not long ago renounced all thoughts of creature

righteousness? Have you not long felt that you are a vile sinner before God? Do you not often groan over your uncleanness? Have you not fled to Christ alone for salvation? Do you not renounce every other ground of acceptance but in Christ? And do you not trust wholly in his blood? Then why are you fearful, seeing it is such that Christ hath made free? Oh! look away from yourself, and every other object, to Christ crucified, risen, and ascended; believe that He hath done what God declares He has, and be assured that it is because the Spirit hath quickened you that you have been convinced of sin, and been brought as a guilty, needy one to the Savior. Be comforted, then, dear trembling child of God, for it is because the Lord hath loved you with an everlasting love, that with loving-kindness He hath drawn you to Himself through Christ; and the testimony of His word is, that your sins are forgiven, you are justified from all things, you shall not come into condemnation, you have everlasting life — you have passed from death unto life; Christ is your righteousness and life; He ever lives to make intercession for you; and He bids you to be of good cheer, and to go in peace. Rest, then, in God's faithfulness to His own word; for

He cannot deny Himself (2 Tim. 2:13).

May the Holy Spirit take of these precious things of Christ, and reveal them for much blessing and comfort to your soul.

It is in this

liberty

that the Christian is exhorted to

stand fast,

and to beware of slipping from it into any

yoke of bondage (Gal. 5:1).

There are many fascinating temptations presented by the adversary to induce us to yield, but we must

stand fast.

Our present peace and strength for the Lord's service are connected with our standing fast in this liberty. Abiding in Him, we shall be strong — strong in faith; giving glory to God; strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus; strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Oh, for more of the power and communion of the Holy Ghost, to enable us to

stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free (Gal. 5:1)!

Then the language of every heart will be —

"My comfort, my rejoicing, all shall be,

Christ died and rose! He died and rose for me!

He lives for me! for me He pleads above!

I'm lost in wonder at Immanuel's love!"

But perhaps my reader is a stranger to these precious things of Christ. You are serving Satan by your sins, little thinking it is so, because his service is connected with self-indulgence — he allows you to fulfil the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and that is a sweet morsel to you. But do you ever think that you must give an account of yourself to God? Have you ever considered, that because you are God's creature, He is justly entitled to all your heart, and mind, and strength? Do you not sometimes feel pangs of conscience, telling you that all is not right? Do not thoughts of death and judgment terrify you? Does it never occur to you, that the Son of God came down from heaven, and in wondrous love died for such as you are? Have you not heard again and again that there is salvation in no other name — that He is the only door of escape from wrath — the only way of admission into glory? Then, will you still be careless, still love sin, still choose darkness rather than light, still prefer the bondage of Satan to the liberty of the gospel, still rush onward to the glittering sword of the fiery judgment of the Son of man? Oh, my reader, turn ye, turn ye; why will ye die? The gospel yet proclaims liberty for the captives; cleansing for the vilest, blackest sinner; righteousness for the most profligate and filthy; acceptance and favour with God for the greatest rebel; yea, for whosoever receives Jesus, the Savior whom God hath sent! Can you any longer refuse the blessed tidings? Can you, will you go on in hardness of heart against such unheard-of love? Will you be deaf to the cries, and groans, and agonies of Christ? Will you still refuse to lift up your eyes to Calvary's cross, and read in Christ's death God's love to sinners? Doth your proud heart yet say, I will not have Christ Jesus to reign over me? Or do you begin to think of the value of your soul, and that it is high time to flee from the wrath to come? Oh, that the Spirit of God might graciously fasten these eternally important thoughts upon your conscience, so that the sincere cry of your heart may be —

“Just as I am — without one plea,

But that Thy blood was shed for me;

And that Thou bid'st me come to Thee,

O Lamb of God, I come!

“Just as I am — and waiting not

To rid my soul of one dark blot;

To Thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot,

O Lamb of God, I come!”

Faith and Unbelief

And she said, Behold, thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister-in-law. And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God (Ruth 1:15, 16).

To whatever part of the Bible we turn, we find, when under the Spirit's teaching, great gospel truths brought before us. It seems as if salvation by grace were stamped on every page, and the Lord Jesus Christ continually presented to us as the Savior of lost, undone sinners. In the New Testament these truths are plainly brought out; but in the Old Testament Scriptures they commonly come before us in the form of types and shadows.

The book of Ruth has been valued by many Christians as containing typical instruction of a dispensational character. The book of Genesis so abounds with this kind of teaching, that it may be called a table of contents of the whole Bible. In the little book of Ruth, however, we find God's dispensational ways glanced at, and though so briefly, all are preserved in strictest keeping with the divine order. It opens with an account of the people of Israel scattered among the Gentiles, because the Lord in judgment had brought famine on their land; after a while, we find that God so blesses His people again, that Naomi (a sample of the Jewish remnant) returns to her own country, and finds it again the scene of the goodness and mercy of Jehovah; and the book concludes by showing us Naomi, who had so keenly felt her past

bitterness (see Ruth 1:20),

both comforted and nourished. But it is important to notice, that between the scattering of these Israelites, and their subsequent restoration and blessing, a poor outcast sinner of the Gentiles hears of the goodness of the God of Israel, believes the report, confesses her attachment to the Lord God of Israel, and ultimately becomes the wife of the gracious and wealthy Boaz, who alone had the right to redeem; and then, and not till then, the heart of the returned Israelite is made to rejoice. All this is plain to those who have prayerfully meditated on the prophetic Scriptures.

And where, I would ask, are the Jews now? Are they not scattered among the Gentiles, their city lying in heaps, and their land in a state of poverty and darkness? as the apostle saith, they are

broken off because of unbelief (see Rom. 11:20).

They will, however, yet be restored to their own land; they will be grafted in again to their own olive tree; they will have the spirit of grace and supplication poured out upon them; and

they shall look upon Him whom they pierced (John 19:37),

be brought into the blessings of the new covenant, and filled with joy and gladness; but not till the fullness of the Gentiles is come in, not till the calling out of the Church by the gospel testimony is accomplished, and the Lord Himself descends from heaven to meet her, and take her to the marriage supper of the Lamb. Now, I say, Israel as a nation is for the time under God's judgment, because of their sin (save as one and another, according to the election of grace, now receives the

Savior); and God is preaching the gospel of forgiveness of sins to every creature, and calling out of the Gentiles a people for His name (see Acts 15:14).

The blessed proclamation, that there is bread enough and to spare in the Father's house for poor returning prodigals, is now being sent forth; the glorious testimony of

the living bread which came down from heaven (John 6:51)

is

preached unto the Gentiles (1 Tim. 3:16);

and in a little while the Lord will come again to receive His Church unto Himself. After this, the nation of Israel's joy will be realized; for the Scripture saith,

There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob (Rom. 11:26).

Then

Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the whole earth with fruit (Isa. 27:6).

Having thus briefly looked at the general features of the book of Ruth, let us now consider the instruction contained in the verses before us.

1st. Let us contemplate the moral condition of this woman, who was afterwards brought into such honor and blessing;

2nd. The report she heard;

3rd. The effect of the report; and,

4th. The warning presented to us in the case of Orpah her sister.

1. RUTH'S MORAL CONDITION. She was a sinner of the Gentiles, outside the privileges of the favoured nation of Israel, far off from God, an idolater; her origin and birth loathsome in the extreme, a Moabite, concerning whom the law of Moses declared, that one

shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord; even to their tenth generation (Deut. 23:3).

She was, therefore, without God, and without hope in the world. We also are fallen in Adam, Gentiles, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, far off, not having the privileges of Jews, all by nature children of wrath; we have no claim whatever upon God; we deserve only His righteous condemnation, because we have rebelled against Him, and transgressed against His holy laws. Such is our condition. But the mercy is, that God — while His ancient people (the Jews) are scattered in unbelief — is now calling us Gentiles who believe to Himself, and giving us pardon and peace through the atoning blood of His beloved Son.

2. THE REPORT. While Ruth was in this sinful condition, in the far off country of the Moabites, she heard the good report,

that Jehovah had visited His people in giving them bread (Ruth 1:6).

This report she believed; and it was this testimony of the goodness and mercy of the God of Israel that won her heart, and animated her whole soul. And, beloved reader, what is the report now? Is it not that God has sent His Son to be the Savior of the lost? Is it not that He has provided

living bread (John 6:51)

for poor, dying, perishing sinners? Is it not that God, in pure, wondrous love, delivered up His own Son to the death of the cross, that sinners might be saved from the wrath to come? Is it not that by Christ crucified sin is for ever put away, and Christ Himself the righteousness of every sinner that believes in the Lord Jesus? Yes, every sinner, however vile and unclean — even Jerusalem sinners, and Moabitish sinners — whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. Our Lord Jesus Himself said,

I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world (John 6:51).

What a glorious report to reach the ears of broken-hearted and heavy-laden sinners! What blessed news! How kind and full of love is God, who, instead of banishing us all from His presence because of our transgressions, has sent His only-begotten Son to die that we might live; and having raised Him from the dead, because He had accomplished the work of eternal redemption, now commands this blessed report to be proclaimed to every creature. But who believes? Ah! well might the prophet exclaim,

Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? (Isa. 53:1).

3. THE EFFECTS OF THIS REPORT. When the gospel is received into the heart by faith, it always leads the soul to God, because it reveals God's love to us. It is indeed the gospel of the grace of God. It unfolds His glorious attributes; shows forth His gracious character; testifies of His love and mercy to lost sinners; and proclaims life and pardon to the dead in trespasses and sins. When the heart has been opened by the Holy Ghost to receive this good report, it at once attracts the soul to God, and produces confidence in Him. A thorough change of mind thus takes place, so that God is no longer judged to be a hard master, and an austere man; but He is seen to be most gracious and merciful, full of love and compassion, and abundant in goodness and truth. Thus it was with Ruth. The good report, that

Jehovah had visited His people in giving them bread (Ruth 1:6),

at once enabled her to turn from idols to serve the living and true God. So truly, so decidedly, was her heart attracted to the Lord God of Israel, that when her sister turned back, and she was earnestly besought to take the same course, her unhesitating and steadfast response was,

Intreat me not to leave thee . . . for thy God shall be my God (Ruth 1:16).

This is a very important point to contemplate, for the human mind may be in a certain way exercised about religion and religious things, short of a spiritual birth; but unless the glory of God be seen in the face of Jesus Christ, unless God's character be known as the sinner's Savior, there can be no sincere turning to God, no confidence in Him, no power to walk in the truth for His glory. But when the death of Christ is beheld by faith, as God's provision for dying, guilty, helpless sinners, and preached to every creature by the Savior's own command; when the sin-burdened

conscience hears the Most High God saying,

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool (Isa. 1:18);

then the soul finds rest in the bosom of God Himself as a sin-hating and yet a sin-pardoning God. The love of God is now shed abroad in the heart; our faith and hope are in God;

we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1);

we love Him, because He first loved us (1 John 4:19);

and the happy soul exclaims

“How can I sink with such a prop

As the Eternal God,

Who bears the earth's huge pillars up,

And spreads the heavens abroad?

“How can I die while Jesus lives,

Who rose and left the dead?

Pardon and life my soul receives

From mine exalted Head.”

But this is not the only effect of believing the good report. Ruth also said,

Thy people shall be my people (Ruth 1:16).

So it is with souls now who are born of God. They love the Bible, because it is God's word; they love holiness, because it is God's way; and they love all Christians, because they are objects of God's love. Many believers have found, in times of sore temptation, the greatest comfort in that inspired declaration,

We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren (1 John 3:14).

It is impossible to be a child of God without loving His people.

If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? . . . and every one that loveth Him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of Him (1 John 4:20, 5:1).

This is very plain. In the subsequent history of Ruth, we always find her in association and companionship with the people of the Lord. The God of Israel was her God, and His people her people. Sometimes we see her gleaning in the kinsman-redeemer's field; at another time we find her eating and drinking with his servants; but we never find her going back to the gods and people of the Moabites.

Another point to be noticed in this narrative, as an effect of the good report, is that she proved in her experience the reality of it. She not only credited the statement that God had visited His people with bread, but she ate of it, and was sufficed. Dry doctrines, however true, can only feed the intellect; but the sinner that is compelled to cry out,

I perish with hunger (Luke 15:17),

feels that he must eat living bread, he must feed upon Christ for his own soul's necessities, he must come to the Savior for salvation, he can be satisfied with nothing else. This is what all true believers experience. The gospel, as we have seen, brings the sinner, through Christ, to God. He not only hears God's blessed testimony to the death of Jesus, but he looks there for salvation and lives; he eats, for his own eternal blessing, by faith, the flesh and blood of the Son of God, as that which fully meets his own soul's need, and has also fully met all God's just claims on the sinner's behalf. He eats and is sufficed. He realizes the flesh of the Son of man to be

living bread (John 6:51),

and views with eternal importance those words of Jesus —

Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed (John 6:53-55).

Yes, those who really receive the gospel which God hath sent feel that they do not embrace mere sentiments, or a formal set of religious views; but they renounce every other refuge, and trust in the atoning blood of the Lord Jesus from absolute necessity. As a man just aroused from sleep flees from a house enveloped in flames of fire, as a starving man eagerly devours a piece of bread, or as a sinking man cleaves to a life-boat, so every true believer gratefully welcomes the crucified and risen Savior as the only hope set before him in the gospel. The language of his heart is —

“Save me, Christ, or else I die!

None but Christ can satisfy,

None but Christ to me be given,

None but Christ on earth or heaven.”

We might also notice other points in the experience of this faithful woman, which correspond with the experience of the household of faith in all ages, such as having all her needs supplied, being enabled to minister bread to others after she herself had been sufficed, finding increasing blessing as she went on her way, happy communion with her gracious, wealthy benefactor and his servants, the soul-humbling effects of grace, &c.; but I pass on to notice that her pilgrimage was terminated, and her hope consummated by her marriage with the mighty man of Israel, her redeemer. And what is the Church's hope now? Is it not to see Jesus, to be with Him and like Him for ever? Are we not expecting to be the bride of the Lamb? and has not that blessed Redeemer, who hath sustained, and comforted, and fed us so often upon His own flesh and blood, said,

I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I

am, there ye may be also (John 14:3)?

Yes, Christ Himself is the believer's hope. Nothing short of seeing Christ, and being with Him, and like Him, can satisfy the desires of truly regenerated souls. The apostle Paul says on this subject,

We look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His own glorious body (Phil. 3:20, 21);

and again,

Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, &c. (Titus 2:13, 14).

Peter says,

Be diligent, that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless (2 Pet. 3:14);

and John also, by the same Spirit, writes,

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure (1 John 3:2, 3).

The next great event, then, that the Scripture points to, is the Lord's return from heaven; and the true hope of the Church is for the Bridegroom to come, and take those who are ready with Him to the marriage. Oh, dear children of God! What are we really looking for? What is our expectation? Are we looking for Christ, and loving His appearing? for

unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation (Heb. 9:28).

Christ is all to the believer. It is Christ who is his life, righteousness, and peace; and his true expectation is to reign with Christ, and share His honor and glory. And we may be sure that the heart of Jesus now looks forward to that time with inconceivable delight.

Father,

said He,

I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory (John 17:24).

If the question be asked, When will Jesus come? we reply, We know not. We are told to watch; for we know not when the time is. Now, it behoves us to love and serve Him, to walk in His ways,

not to glean in another field (Ruth 2:8).

Soon our pilgrimage will be over, our opportunities of confessing a rejected Savior in an evil world will have passed away, and then we shall be for ever with the Lord. What a glorious prospect! What fullness of unmingled joy! What perfect rest and satisfaction then! Oh, that we may all be so in love with our Savior, that our constant, hearty response to His

Behold, I come quickly (Rev. 22:12)!

may be,

Even so: come, Lord Jesus (Rev. 22:20)!

4. THE WARNING. Orpah, too, heard the good report, and for the moment seemed to be influenced by it; but her heart was not impressed by the truth, her conscience was not exercised about the goodness of God in giving bread again to sinful Israel. Moved, however, by the example of others, she walked for a little while with them; but carnal reasoning and temptation soon overcame her, and she returned to her Moabitish swine-trough again. She read not the lessons of love in the ways of Jehovah, she felt not the

goodness of God which leadeth to repentance (see Rom. 2:4),

she perceived not that the people of the Lord had any claim upon her esteem and confidence over the accursed Moabites; in fact, she did not consider matters as they really were in God's sight; and she therefore followed her own will and inclination, and returned

unto her people, and unto her gods (Ruth 1:15).

This is very solemn; yet, it is to be feared, that the gospel message of reconciliation to God by the death of His Son meets with the same rejection by many now. They hear, and seem interested in religious people and things for a little while; but, when temptation comes, they go back again to their people and their gods. They hear, but THEY BELIEVE NOT; they do not receive the Word preached into an honest heart; their feelings are moved for the time, but they are not brought into exercise of conscience before God about their own state; their hearts therefore, after all, really cling to their people and their gods. In every nation the ungodly have their gods — some darling objects of their hearts, and these vary too, according as circumstances change, and life advances; for that which engrosses the human heart at one period of life has little charm at another. There are household gods, and public gods, gods for youth, and gods for advanced age — not always visible, I grant, but not the less real. The poor man has his gods, and the rich have their gods; for fallen man is naturally an idolater; his heart is alienated from God, and his lust and pride thirst for gratification; hence he rejoices in the works of his own hands, he worships and serves the creature more than the Creator. Such is man. Unless, therefore, an object be presented to him, beyond what his natural eye beholds, capable of meeting every craving of his soul, man still clings to his gods. It is, then, most blessed to see how completely the death of the Son of God meets man in his sins, and is capable of filling his soul with everlasting consolation and hope, of practically delivering from the

gods many

and the

lords many (1 Cor. 8:5)

of this present evil world, and of elevating his affections to things above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

And now, dear reader, let me affectionately ask, How have you treated the gospel? What effect has the good report had upon you? Has the goodness of God led you to repentance, and to

receive God's salvation through Christ? Have you so beheld the mercy of God in saving you from wrath through the death of His Son, that you are constrained to love God and His children? Or, are you clinging still to the pleasures of sin, and deceiving yourself with the vain hope that you will one day alter your course? Were you not once moved, when hearing of the love of God to sinful men in the cross of His beloved Son, to feel something of its solemn importance? Did you not resolve to walk with those who love the Savior in preference to your former companions? Then, why are you gone back (Ruth 1:15)?

Why are you still living in sin with the enemies of Christ? My friend, beware of trifling with a matter which concerns your eternal welfare! It may, perhaps, be said of you,

This night thy soul shall be required of thee (Luke 12:20).

Let me faithfully warn you! I have lately heard of the death of a young woman which I must relate. On a Friday morning the wretched girl in great distress cried out, "I know that I am deathstruck, and damned to all eternity; the devil has told me so, and that he will drag me to endless torments at six o'clock, to the pit prepared for me!" Her agonies were inexpressible and truly heart-rending, so that even her companions, whom she earnestly exhorted to repent and leave their wicked ways, were alarmed and much affected, yet knew not how to meet her need; they knew not Jesus, who is the source of every true comfort, as meeting the sinner's need; they knew not that His blood cleanseth from all sin. The poor, miserable girl, with screams of horror, exclaimed, "Can nothing save me? Is there no escape?" . . . She several times jumped out of bed screaming, and in the most dreadful manner exclaimed, "You shall not have me yet; it is not six o'clock." She continued raving thus till the hour she had so often named: the clock struck six, and she expired.

Reader! be assured that you are hastening on toward the fiery wrath of God, however pleasurable it may seem for the moment, unless you are brought, as a guilty sinner, to trust in His beloved Son.

The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 6:23).

The Christian's Position and Hope

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His" (Rom. 8:1-9).

"For in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and power" (Col. 2:9, 10).

By a Christian I mean a person who is

in Christ (Rom. 8:1);

not a mere nominal professor of Christianity as contrasted with a Mohammedan, an idolater, or a Jew; but a sinner who has received the Lord Jesus Christ, whom God sent, as his Savior. By being in Christ

I do not refer to God's eternal purpose, but to the blessed reality of being regarded by God as now standing before Him in all the acceptability of His beloved Son. God's purpose before the world was, that all the saints of this present time should be

in Christ;

but, as Paul says,

we were in the flesh (Rom. 7:5),

we . . . were by nature children of wrath, even as others (Eph. 2:3);

and in the last of Romans he speaks of some being in Christ before him.

However men may classify the human family, Scripture now speaks of only two classes — those who are

in Christ,

and those who are

in the flesh (Rom. 7:5).

All are naturally in the flesh. They may be moral, virtuous, amiable, kind or the reverse, educated or uneducated, religious in their way or irreligious; but being only in their natural state, they are far from God.

To be carnally minded is death (Rom. 8:6).

In Rom. 8:7 we are told that

the carnal mind

— that is, the mind of man in his natural state —

is enmity against God;

quite contrary to and opposed to God. But, worse than this, it is lawless, and refuses to obey God —

is not subject to the law of God.

But worst of all, God says it is so bad that it cannot be subject —

neither indeed can be (Rom. 8:7).

Thus the divine verdict as to the condition of every child of Adam is hopelessly bad. Hence God Himself does not propose to mend or improve man in the flesh, for He says it cannot be subject to Him; but He gives him life. Christ says,

I am come that they might have life (John 10:10).

God creates us in Christ Jesus.

If any man be in Christ — a new creation (see 2 Cor. 5:17).

He gives us also the Holy Ghost to link us with Christ in the heavenlies. It is not true that God gives people His Spirit to help them in the flesh, or to improve the flesh; but having given those who believe in the Lord Jesus life, eternal life, and made them sons, He sends forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. It is a point of the highest importance in the present day, when man is so exalted, to see that God pronounces man in the flesh to be hopelessly and irremediably bad. It is God's verdict of the natural standing, which belongs to us all as

in Adam (1 Cor. 15:22).

The whole nature is foul, utterly unclean, and incapable of being made fit for God's presence. The whole history of man from the fall shows that nothing can be worse. Judgments, commandments, ordinances, even the personal ministry of Christ Himself, failed to improve man in the flesh, and only brought out the evil of the heart. As to law, it is positively stated that

as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse (Gal. 3:10).

There was, therefore, but one way in which God could deal with man in the flesh; namely, judgment unto death. This God has done in a Substitute, His only-begotten, well-beloved Son, for all who believe in His name. Jesus, who knew no sin, was made sin for us. We are also told in

Rom. 8:3 —

What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.

Thus we see that

sin in the flesh

has been condemned by God Himself in Christ crucified. It is also most blessedly true that Christ bare our sins, suffered for our actual transgressions, in His own body on the tree; but here it is rather the bad nature, what we were in the flesh. And, after all, this is the greatest plague of every true Christian. Many who have enjoyed the blessed reality of forgiveness of sins are so troubled because of lusts, pride, inward feelings, and selfishness within, that the question with them often is, "Am I a Christian?" It is most blessed, therefore, to see that God has dealt with this judicially for us in the death of Jesus. Hence we react in Rom. 6:6:

Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him.

This is what God has done. It is an accomplished fact, whether we believe it or not, that God has judicially set aside our old man in the death of Jesus. So that, when contemplating Jesus in death upon the tree, we see how that God has not only dealt with Christ in judgment there for the transgressions we have committed against Him, but also that our old evil nature, our old man, is crucified with Him. Happy those who simply believe what God says about it. Paul did. It was, therefore, to him a blessed reality. He could say,

I am crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:20);

and he could assert it also as a divine fact, that

they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts (Gal. 5:24).

It is quite true that God's children feel, and deeply feel, this evil nature; in fact, only those who are taught of God do; but accepting by faith the full value of what God has done for them in the death of His Son, they hearken to the divine injunction so to reckon (Rom. 6:11):

Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Is this the way, beloved friends, that we reckon? The truth is most important both for peace and walk. How could we who feel the evil workings within be at rest before God, unless we saw that He had dealt with it, and judicially set it aside in the death of Christ? When we have been sometimes ready to cry out,

O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me (not who shall forgive my sins, but deliver me) from the body of this death? (Rom. 7:24)

we can surely then look up to God and say, "Thou hast delivered me from this old man by the death of Christ";

I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 7:25).

The believer is delivered from it by being dead to sin in Jesus his Substitute. Quite true that he still feels it; but he knows it to be a judged and condemned foe. He is therefore content to go on with these two natures, saying,

So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin (Rom. 7:25).

And he knows too something of the meaning of our Lord's words,

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit (John 3:6).

As to power in walk and conflict, he cannot now trust self, cannot look there for resources; for he knows that in him — that is, in the flesh — dwells no good thing; he knows that he has died to sin; he therefore looks only to Christ risen and ascended for everything, and this is the great secret of spiritual power.

It is, then, most blessed to see how graciously God has delivered us, in righteousness, from "our old man," by the death of Christ, and given us life in Him risen; thus are we freed from the standing in sin and death which we had when

we were in the flesh (Rom. 7:5).

The way being now cleared, let us look a little more particularly at what Scripture teaches as to our position and hope.

In Rom. 8:9 God says,

Ye are not in the flesh,

and the first verse speaks of us as

in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1),

and the second verse of

life in Christ Jesus making us free from the law of sin and death (see Rom. 8:2).

What a wonderful thing it is to be

free from sin (Rom. 6:18, 22) —

free from the law of sin and death (Rom. 8:2);

but how can it be otherwise if God regards us now as not in the flesh, but in Christ, who is at His own right hand? What an exalted position! Christ our life, our peace, our righteousness, yea, blessed with

all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 1:3).

Can anything be plainer? We see by the death of Christ that our fleshly standing is gone, that before God we are not in the flesh, but that we have another life and standing

in Christ.

Well, then, might the apostle say,

The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me (Gal. 2:20).

What a position the grace of God has brought us into! Could we be higher than in Christ risen and ascended? as the apostle expresses it in Ephesians, quickened together, raised up together, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. All of God's rich and abundant mercy, the fruit of His own creative power:

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works (Eph. 2:10).

All of grace and to the praise of His glory. We do not hope to be a new creation; for it is a present reality —

If any man be in Christ, a new creation (see 2 Cor. 5:17).

A Christian, then, is not a man mended up in the flesh, but a person who has a new nature, has life in a risen Christ, is a new creation. He does not wait to die in order to have this; for he is now in Christ, created in Christ Jesus. It is quite true that He will not have the redemption of the body till Christ comes; but Scripture speaks of us now as

in Christ,

that Christ who is in the heavenlies is our life, that we are a new creation, filled to the full in Christ, fully blessed in Him—

Ye are complete in Him (Col. 2:10).

What depths of divine grace, what everlasting consolation, what a source of joy and gladness, God thus sets before us!

Observe that in Col. 2:9 the person of Christ is most blessedly set before us. The man Christ Jesus is in heaven. The Nazarene is glorified —

crowned with glory and honour (Heb. 2:9).

The man is there who once trod Jerusalem's streets, sat on Sychar's well, and wept tears of deepest sympathy with sorrowing ones at Bethany. But now He is in glory. When here He was God manifested in the flesh, and there He is no less God; for

in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col. 2:9).

And all this divine glory, shining brightly in the risen and ascended man, is brought to bear on the subject we are considering; for the next words are,

And ye are complete in Him (Col. 2:10).

Where am I then? What is my position now before God? I am told it is morning-star which comes before the day. The coming of Christ to meet us in the air is not found in the Old Testament Scriptures; but was a revelation made to Paul to communicate to the church, as we find in 1 Thess. 4:15. Israel's glory will be ushered in with judgment; the Christian's glory will be ushered in with a shout.

What can the Christian hope for but Christ's coming? He does not hope to be a child of God; he is one. He does not hope to be in Christ; he is in Christ. What can his hope be, then, but the coming of the Lord Himself to take him to glory? Surely it is a blessed hope, a comforting hope, and a soul-purifying hope. Well might the Thessalonian believers turn from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven; and well might the apostle Paul say,

Our citizenship is in, heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ (see Phil. 3:20).

in Christ, complete in Him,

in whom dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily,

who is

the Head of all principality and power (Col. 2:10).

Can anything, I ask, exceed the dignity, the holy and exalted character, of the position God has given us in Christ? Could anything be added to warrant the heart's fullest confidence? Could we have more perfect security? or could anything else be wished to constrain us to devotedness of heart and life to Him who has so loved us? It is not future blessings we are now contemplating, but present possessions. Have we entered upon them? and are we living upon them as present realities? Some Christians seem like men who have been saved from drowning by a life-boat, and are fearing as to whether they will ever reach the land. They do not see their present standing in Christ. It is true that we are not yet bodily in heavenly places; but it is true that Christ is there and that we are in Him.

Ye are (not shall be, but are), complete in Him, which is the

Head of all principality and power (Col. 2:10).

All that we need for happy and solid enjoyment of these wondrous truths is to credit what God has said. It is a work worthy of God, which He has accomplished for us in Christ Jesus, and by His precious blood; and to Him be all the glory.

This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son hath not life (1 John 5:11, 12).

But more than this; we are united to Christ risen and ascended by the Holy Ghost:

For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body (1 Cor. 12:13).

A few words as to the Christian's hope. We must not confound our hope with the Jewish hope. The Jews are taught to look for the Messiah to come to the earth and set up the glories of the kingdom. We look for Christ to come into the air and catch us up to meet Him. The Jews wait for the day of the Lord, and their scriptures abound with instruction concerning it. We wait for the

Assurance

“And he said, Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?” (Gen. 15:8).

We read in the Gospel by John that

the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ (John 1:17);

and while it is blessed to contemplate the glorious testimony of divine grace coming in, after man had proved himself so helpless and guilty under the law, yet we must not suppose that the gospel was not preached before Christ came. It was preached to Adam, after he had fallen beneath the power of sin and Satan, in the promise that the Seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. It was also preached to Abraham four hundred years before the law was given, when God said,

In thee shall all nations be blessed (Gal. 3:8).

It is important to see this, and to consider how God's grace abounded to man, as a sinner, long before the law came. In fact, the Scriptures everywhere teach, that it has only been in the way of grace that God has ever established man in blessing since the fall. When, therefore, the apostle Paul, in the New Testament, treats of the subject of justification, he usually takes us back to Abraham, as having lived long before the law was given, to show that a sinner is reckoned righteous before God only in the way of faith. This is very important, as it clears from the mind all questions of law-fulfilling as a ground of justification, it leads the soul away from the common thought of creature-fitness to come up to God's standard, and prepares the anxious enquirer to receive the peace-speaking fact, that God has come down to man while a sinner, with present forgiveness and eternal redemption, in the death of His beloved Son.

God's verdict long ago went forth, that

by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight (Rom. 3:20).

The law made demands on fallen, sinful man, such as he was unable to fulfil — it demanded righteousness from man to God in the way of works; it therefore proved all to be guilty, and under condemnation. The question, then, with a soul truly sensible of his guilt is, Can man be accounted righteous by God in any other way? Can a sinner have any ground of assurance in any other way? The answer is, Yes; God has come down to man, when a ruined, helpless sinner, in Christ, and brought a perfect and everlasting righteousness to him in the way of faith. This, as I have said, has been always God's way. He made coats of skins, and clothed Adam and his wife. Abel obtained witness that he was righteous by faith. Noah became heir of the righteousness which is by faith: God said to him,

Thee have I seen righteous before me (Gen. 7:1).

Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness (Gal. 3:6).

All these are examples of righteousness in the way of faith before the law was given. But did the law alter this ground of assurance and confidence in God? No; for David, who lived under the law; describes the blessedness of the man unto whom the Lord imputeth righteousness without works, saying,

Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin (Rom. 4:7, 8).

And Paul's fervent language, when coming to the close of an unparalleled life of devotedness to his Master, was, that I may be

found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith (Phil. 3:9).

But some may ask, Why by faith? Is not faith an act of creature-merit? We reply, No; faith is not a work of the flesh, but a fruit of the Spirit. Faith is the gift of God. Faith is always self-renouncing; it brings a broken, empty heart to receive and welcome God's gracious gifts. Faith, therefore, gives all the glory to God. As another has said, "Believing in Christ, we come to Him for all, employ Him in all, trust Him through all, look to Him under all, hope in Him to do all, and to Him ascribe the glory of all."

To return to the chapter before us, we find that Abram

believed in the Lord, and He counted it to him for righteousness (Gen. 15:6).

And so now every broken-hearted sinner that believes in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation is justified before God. He may have seasons of conflict and temptation, yet he is justified.

By Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses (see Acts 13:39).

They are justified by the blood of Christ. By His death Christ put away their sins, that they might be made the righteousness of God in Him. Hence we are further told, that

Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth (Rom. 10:4).

This is blessed. This is the true grace of God wherein we stand, and the reception of this glorious truth into the heart gives assurance. Here is ground for unwavering, unceasing assurance; for it springs from God's sovereign grace; it is manifested in Christ's perfect work, and based not upon our frames, feelings, or even our measure of apprehension of it, but on the perfect righteousness, unchangeable love, and never-failing faithfulness of God.

The work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever (Isa. 32:17).

"Unchangeable His will,

Whatever be my frame,

His loving heart is still

Eternally the same;

Our souls through many changes go, His love no change can ever know.”

But all believers have not this happy assurance. Some, because they do not know the blessed truth, that the righteousness of God is unto all and upon all them that believe. Others, because carelessness of walk grieves the Spirit, and dims the eyes of their understanding and faith. Moreover there are various characters of faith. We read of

little faith (Matt. 14:31), great faith (Matt. 8:10),

and the

full assurance of faith (Heb. 10:22);

but the weakest in the faith is not less justified, not less accounted righteous, than the strongest in the faith. We do not get pardoned at one time, justified at another, sanctified at another. No; receiving Christ crucified, risen and glorified, for salvation, we have all at once. We are washed in His blood, justified by His blood, sanctified by His blood.

All things are yours (1 Cor. 3:21),

said the apostle;

and ye are Christ's (1 Cor. 3:23).

The Father

hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 1:3).

This, I say, is the present portion of the most feeble-minded believer in Christ; but the personal enjoyment of this wondrous grace will be just as we, by faith, abide in the Lord Jesus.

There are some believers who are so weak in faith, and so uninstructed in divine things (perhaps because they do not daily read and prayerfully meditate on the Scriptures), that they stagger at being told that they have life and righteousness in Christ; while they believe in Christ for the forgiveness of sins, they shrink from crediting the glorious reality that God has made Christ to be unto them

wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30).

Such, however, lose much joy, as well as strength for service and conflict, and are often filled with gloomy and distressing thoughts; they doubt, and fear, and brood over self and circumstances, because they do not look away from every other object straight to Christ at God's right hand, and believe God's infallible word, which assures them of their completeness and security in the glorified Savior of sinners. In some respects they are like Abram was in the Scripture before us; for although God had told him that He had brought him out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give him the land to inherit it, he seemed to doubt whether God really meant what He said — whether He would keep His word and fulfil His promise. Abram was righteous by faith, yet he had doubt and mistrust, like many in the present day. God told him that He brought him from Ur to give him the land. This should have been enough to have warranted assurance and confidence; but it was not. He therefore said,

Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it? (Gen. 15:8).

This leads us more particularly to the subject of assurance. What is it? Is it spiritual attainment? or is it equally the portion of the babe in Christ, who simply takes God at His word? We reply, It is resting, as a sinner, on God's promise in Christ. This many babes in Christ enjoy. God has given His word of truth, shown us His work in Christ, and revealed Himself as the faithful and unchangeable God. He tells us that He

so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

This should be enough; but, alas! it often is not. It is an awful thing to doubt God's word; and yet this is the chief reason why many believers have not the full assurance of faith. Abram was mistrusting God about the land when he said,

Whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?(Gen. 15:8).

What was God's reply? Did He tell Abram that it depended upon his experience, or duties, or feelings? No; He taught Abram that blessing comes to fallen man only through sacrifice, that God's eternal blessings are made sure to us by sacrifice; therefore God sent him to the sacrifice to realize assurance. God's reply was,

Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she-goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtle dove, and a young pigeon (Gen. 15:9).

There, at the sacrifice, Abram was to learn God's character and mind, whereby he might have the assurance that he would inherit the land.

It seems to me that we learn from the case before us that there are two things needful for any one to enjoy assurance: —

I. Self-renunciation;

2. The apprehension of God's thoughts of Christ. Let us consider them a little.

1. SELF-RENUNCIATION. It is wonderful how thoughts of creature-righteousness cleave to us. It is hard indeed habitually to take the place of

no confidence in the flesh (Phil. 3:3);

that

all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags (Isa. 64:6);

that in our flesh dwells

no good thing (Rom. 7:18);

and that no measure of devotedness can make the promise of God in Christ more secure. But these things the Spirit of God teaches. He convinces of sin, and testifies of Christ; and God's declaration must be carried out, that

no flesh should glory in His presence (1 Cor. 1:29).

It is often a very humbling process to learn by the Spirit's teaching, that being born anew does not improve the flesh; that the believer has two natures; that there is no similarity in "the flesh" and "the Spirit"; that "the flesh" always remains the same, only that it is kept under by "the Spirit."

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit (John 3:6).

Do we not gather from the fact, that while Abram was before the sacrifice, and
an horror of great darkness fell upon him (Gen. 15:12),

he was taught by God Himself the humbling lessons of self-loathing and unworthiness, that he might be the more thoroughly convinced that he could inherit the land only on the ground of God's free grace. And when the Holy Spirit opens up to us our history before God, and discloses to us the real character of the thoughts and intents of our hearts, the iniquity of our most holy things, the pride of our humblest doings, the self-love and unbelief that are associated with our most devoted hours, do we not know something too of a horror of darkness? We often need, as well as Abram, humbling exercises, that we may lean wholly upon God, and know how to ground all our expectations of good on a source entirely outside ourselves. And where shall we learn these lessons so effectually as in the presence of God, in the contemplation of what He has done for us, and has made us in Christ? So long as thoughts of creature-merit or sufficiency are allowed by us, doubts and fears will distress the soul, because the eye will look within, instead of wholly to God in Christ. Or, if thoughts of our own doing be mixed up with our standing before God, we shall slide away from grace, get under law, and lack assurance; or if we set up some standard of experience and walk, as evidences, so long as we come up to our imagined measure, will there be quiet self-complacency; but when we come short, our fancied evidences will be gone, and gloom, and fear, and perhaps despair, will follow. There must be the sense of our total ruin and vileness in the flesh, to look wholly to God, through Christ, with quietness and assurance. I will refer to an anecdote which remarkably illustrates this point. "An Indian and a white man were both brought under conviction by the same sermon. The Indian was soon brought to rejoice in pardoning mercy; the white man was a long time under distress of mind, and at times was almost ready to despair; but at length he was also brought to experience forgiving love. Some time after, meeting his red brother, he thus addressed him: 'How is it that I should be so long under conviction, when you found comfort so soon?' 'Oh, brother!' replied the Indian, 'me tell you. There come along a rich prince; he purpose to give you a new coat; you look at your coat and say, I don't know, my coat pretty good; I believe it do a little longer. He then offer me a new coat; I look on my old blanket; I say, this good for nothing — I say, this good for nothing; I fling it right away, and accept the new coat. Just so, brother, you keep your righteousness for some time, you loath to give it up; but I, poor Indian, had none, therefore I glad at once to receive righteousness, the Lord Jesus Christ.'"

2. THE APPREHENSION OF GOD'S THOUGHTS OF CHRIST AND HIS WORK. Let none suppose that they will have full assurance of faith, if the contemplation of Christ and His cross be neglected. The Scriptures testify of Him. The Holy Spirit testifies of Him. We know we have the earnest of the Spirit, because we look wholly to the Lord Jesus Christ for acceptance with God; and it is to the person and work of Christ that the Spirit continually leads us. The victims Abram was commanded to take for God were in their prime, to represent the perfection of the

Lamb without spot (see Heb. 9:14).

The fowls came down on the carcass; but he drove them away, because it was God's sacrifice, and should be honored. He divided some into pieces, and laid each piece one against another. Here he remained, before the sacrifice, under divine instruction; and when all around was dark, and a horror of great darkness was within, when every earthly hope and confidence were gone, then a burning furnace and a smoking lamp passed between the pieces — the former, to teach that divine wrath could be expended on the victim, and all the rivers of eternal love flow without obstruction to the sinner that believes; and the latter, to show that divine light had searched the sacrifice, and rightly estimated its value. We are then told that

the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land (Gen. 15:18);

and we do not read that the patriarch had another question on the subject. The threefold cord of his assurance and confidence was the promise of God, the redemption-work of God, and the faithfulness of God. And surely this is the secret of assurance with us. It is not based on what we are, but on what God is; and we know our personal interest in His eternal blessings, by being led by His Spirit to renounce ourselves, and look to the one only sacrifice for sin, the alone ground of acceptance with God.

"Without one thought that's good to plead,

Oh, what could shield me from despair,

But this — though I am vile indeed,

The Lord my righteousness is there?"

Let us now seek to apply these truths. Whenever, dear Christian reader, your soul is assailed with doubts and fears, look at once straight to Jesus — the Lamb as it had been slain, now in the midst of the throne. Beware of looking within for righteousness; for

Christ in the glory is your righteousness (see Rom. 10:4).

Beware of looking at the Spirit's work in you as a ground of justification; for we are justified by the blood of Christ. Beware of comparing yourselves with others as a proof of your acceptance; for Christ only is the way to the Father. Beware of looking at your frames or experiences as evidences; for we often change, and our hearts are very deceitful; but the love of Christ changeth not. Oh, like Abram, look at God's sacrifice! Contemplate the perfection, spotlessness, the eternal beauty and worth of Jesus! His fitness, His fullness, His love, His offices! Consider His ways, His sayings, His sufferings, agonies, blood-shedding and death! Behold the Holy One made sin for us, and let the burning lamp, the light of God's truth, shine upon the scene! Harken to God's testimony! Listen to His judgment of the value of the cross! See sin put away, and righteousness brought in! Welcome the testimony of God, that the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us (yes, us) from all sin; that we are

justified freely by His grace (Rom. 3:24),

and

accepted in the Beloved (Eph. 1:6)!

Oh, behold your iniquities, transgressions, and sins laid upon Him, your old man crucified with Him, the fierce wrath of Jehovah going over Him, that you might be free. Abiding here, self-loathing will take the place of self-righteousness, self-abasement will displace self-confidence, assurance will banish doubt, and praise and thanksgiving will ascend to the Father of mercies in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“Jesus bruised and put to shame,

Tells me all Jehovah's name;

God is love, I surely know,

By the Savior's depths of woe.

“In His spotless soul's distress

I perceive my guiltiness;

Oh, how vile my low estate,

Since my ransom was so great!”

Perhaps my reader is a backslider. You have lost the assurance of your interest in Christ. You were once happy in the Lord, and happy with His people. You took sweet counsel together, and found His ways to be ways of pleasantness and peace. But you grew careless; you neglected secret prayer, you discontinued the daily reading of the Scriptures, you little and little gave up the public and private society of God's children. You became intimate with worldlings, and walked with them. You indulged in sin. Your conscience was at first troubled, but by degrees it became hardened; yet you have not been happy. Your assurance and confidence in God are gone.

O wretched man that I am!(Rom. 7:24)

you sometimes exclaim. Be assured, friend, that Jesus loves you still, though your ways have so grieved Him.

“Midst all thy fears, and sin, and woe, His love will never let thee go.”

Return, then, to Him at once; acknowledge your iniquity; confess your sins; tell Him all your sad course, and He will restore you; He will pardon, He will heal your backslidings, and love you freely.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

But perhaps my reader is not trusting in Christ for salvation. You have heard the gospel, but you believe not. If it be so, you have from the Scripture, not the assurance of salvation, but the assurance of eternal damnation —

He that believeth not shall be damned (Mark 16:16).

God has declared it shall be, and it must be; for God cannot deny Himself. His word must be fulfilled. You refuse mercy, and must have judgment. You disobey God, and He must punish. You reject His salvation, therefore you must have everlasting destruction. Oh, unhappy man! This

world is your heaven, this life is your best, and at the end of your career you will say,

The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and I am not saved (see Jer. 8:20)!

Not saved! Be astonished, ye angels, that men reject this great salvation!! and be assured, my reader, that you are in the broad road to destruction. Every day you draw nearer to the pit of torment, every hour your pleasures of sin become less, every moment you hasten onward to your eternal doom. Is it not so? Can there be a doubt of it, if you remain Christless? Is not His word most decisive? Has not He said, Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish! Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you!

Jesus in Company With a Religious Man and a Sinner

And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat. And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner. And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged. And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace (Luke 7:36-50).

In this brief narrative, we have recorded the ways of Jesus when in company with a sinner, a religious man (Simon the Pharisee), and others that sat at meat with Him.

The circumstances were very simple. The Pharisee, like religious people in our day, had a certain respect for one who had the reputation of being a prophet, or a teacher sent from God. Jesus was therefore an object of interest to him, though he knew Him not as the Son of God, the Savior of sinners. It is lamentable how many seem to make the Lord, or even the Bible, a matter of interest, instead of being a matter of salvation. The Pharisee had invited the Lord to eat with him, and as He came, not to judge the world, but to save, He accordingly went. While there, a notoriously wicked woman came into the house, and, among all the guests, her heart singled out the Lord as the one who alone could meet her need; she cast herself down at His feet behind Him, and it was evident that her soul-distress was very considerable. This fact was enough to appeal loudly to the conscience of the religious Pharisee. He was surprised at his guest allowing a woman of that character to touch Him, so that he really began to suspect whether he had not been estimating Him too highly in thinking Him to be a prophet. This opened the way for the Lord of glory to pour forth, in the presence of them all, the blessed testimony of divine grace — the grace of God which bringeth salvation — and to manifest the fact that He came, not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Simon little thought that his guest was the Son of God. Little either did he suspect that his heart and conscience were laid bare to the eyes of Him whom he had desired to eat with him. The Pharisee feared to tell out his thoughts; but

he spake within himself, saying this man, if He were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth Him: for she is a sinner (Luke 7:39).

Yes, he spake within himself; but the Lord searches the heart. He can read the inmost thought. All is naked to His eye; and He declares that every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart is only evil, and that continually (Gen. 6:5). Such is man before the eye of God — only and continually evil. But Simon, like many others, thought himself righteous, and therefore he despised this sinful woman; he was evidently grieved to see her in his house, and was astonished that his guest should have allowed such a person to touch Him. He marvelled how Jesus could welcome such a sinner; and it is a wonder to unbelieving hearts still, because they think that it is religious or good people that Christ embraces; and they do not believe the blessed fact, that Christ died for the ungodly, and that He saves sinners — guilty, hell-deserving sinners.

How does the Lord meet these unbelieving and self-righteous thoughts of the blind Pharisee? In perfect wisdom, gentleness, and kindness, He says,

Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on (Luke 7:40).

And then, if I mistake not, He draws a portrait of both the sinner and the Pharisee as an appeal to this self-righteous conscience.

A certain creditor had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both (Luke 7:41, 42).

As much as to say, Suppose, then, that it be true that this woman is an open transgressor of God's laws, and that her flagrant sins are manifest, so that she is considered ten times as great a violator of right principles as some others, and call her a five hundred pence debtor; and then suppose that little can be said of Simon as to outward misconduct; suppose even that his transgressions against outward morality are few, and seldom repeated, so that he is only a fifty pence debtor; still, the fact is, that whether the debt be little or much, both are so thoroughly bankrupt, as to have nothing whatever to pay their creditor's demand. This is most important; because it is not now a question of a person being a great sinner, or a little sinner; the question is, Are your sins forgiven? How can you meet God on the judgment of your sins? for you are in debt, and cannot pay. The answer is, that God is the God of all grace, and, frankly, unasked, proclaims forgiveness in pity and mercy, because you cannot liquidate any portion of the debt yourself. This is grace — God in rich mercy forgiving sins,

and justly so too, on the ground of the atoning death of His beloved Son.

Christ died for the ungodly (Rom. 5:6).

He suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God (see 1 Pet. 3:18).

Then the Lord appeals to Simon as to which would love the forgiving creditor most; for the prostrate woman was lavishing, as it were, her grateful heart over the sacred feet of her

newly-found Savior. To this question he answered,

I suppose that he to whom he forgave most (Luke 7:43).

This is clear enough: hence the Savior said,

Thou hast rightly judged (Luke 7:43).

The principles of divine grace and truth being thus laid down, the application follows; and the Lord having drawn a portrait, bringing each guilty and undone before God, alike in need, alike dependent on the free mercy of God, now shows the difference between a soul that apprehends Him as the Savior of sinners, and one, however religious, who knows Him not. How wonderfully skillful was this perfect Preacher in using the truth; for Simon needed to be awakened to a sense of his guilt, and the hollowness of his religious pretensions; the woman needed to be comforted, and filled with that joy and peace which the Savior brought for broken-hearted, sin-convicted people.

He turns then to the woman, but still addresses the Pharisee. Directing Simon's attention to the woman, He says,

I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet (Luke 7:44):

that is, you have not even shown me a common mark of respect and attention:

but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss

— did not salute me with an ordinary mark of affection:

but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment (Luke 7:44, 46).

Thus the blessed Lord shows Simon how much there was in the ways of this despised, sinful woman superior to himself, and, as He afterwards teaches, the spring of all is love — the fruit of a heart moved with gratitude to the Lord. Because of deep-felt need, she clung to Him as the alone Savior, and knew that He only could make her crimson sins white as wool. She had found Him. Her soul had been longing after personal dealing with this Friend of sinners, and now she had found Him, she counted Him worthy of the costliest service. The alabaster box was broken, His feet anointed, after being bathed with tears of grateful love, and wiped with the hairs of her head. Her love was the fruit of forgiveness of her many sins. She therefore loved much. Hence Jesus added,

Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little (Luke 7:47).

But further. The Lord thus far has only addressed Himself to Simon. The woman seems to be all this time lying at His feet. She must be comforted, and learn from the Lord Himself that her filthiness is cleansed, her iniquity pardoned. Therefore Jesus said unto her,

Thy sins are forgiven (Luke 7:48).

Nor is this all; He again addresses Himself to her —

Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace (Luke 7:50).

We have here three present blessings of eternal importance. Present forgiveness of sins, present salvation, present peace. If we had met this woman the next day, and said to her, “Are your sins forgiven? are you saved?” what would have been her reply? “Yes, I have forgiveness; I am saved.” And then, if asked, “Are you quite sure that your sins are forgiven?” would she not have said, “Yes, quite sure, because the Savior told me so; and His word can never fail!”

It is present peace, present forgiveness, present salvation, that so many are denying in our day. They say that we cannot know these things till we come to die. But we have seen what the Lord taught; and there are many more Scripture testimonies to the same effect; and the Scripture cannot be broken. The Lord certainly gave this woman the fullest warrant for taking her stand as a saved person, and that, too, in the way of faith.

Thy faith hath saved thee (Luke 7:50).

It was not her tears, the ointment, or anything else that saved, blessed fruits as they were; but Jesus alone is the Savior, and those who accept Him are perfectly secure. It was not doctrines about Christ, or religious duties, or prayers, or anything else, but Christ Himself to whom she had clung, and known as her very own Savior. It was Himself, the Son which came forth from the Father, whom she had made her refuge, and in whom alone her confidence rested. Blessed sample of simple faith! Blessed testimony, too, of the reality of present forgiveness of sins, present salvation, and present peace, leaving no room for fear or doubt, or a moment's misgiving, as to the security of that soul whose simple trust is in the Lord Jesus, the Savior of lost, guilty sinners.

But those who sat at meat could no longer be silent. Man hates grace. He cannot bear the free, unmerited love of God.

Who is this,

they said,

that forgiveth sins also?(Luke 7:49).

Yes, who is this? That has always been the question, and so it is still.

Who is this?

He was in the world, the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not.

The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

He said,

I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father (John 16:28).

He died upon the cross to save sinners, and having finished the work, God raised Him from the dead, and exalted Him to His own right hand in heaven.

After He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God: from henceforth expecting till His enemies be made His footstool (Heb. 10:12, 13).

Free Grace; or, Living Water

And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb (Rev. 22:1).

There is peculiar solemnity in the closing chapters of the Revelation. Salvation and damnation, life and death, grace and judgment, glory and eternal torment, are the subjects of it; and whether the scene is heavenly glory, or the throne of eternal judgment, the LAMB stands most conspicuous and exalted.

Few people read the Revelation. The excuse of many is that it is so difficult to understand; whereas its title expresses its simplicity. Revelation does not mean that which is difficult, but something revealed, or made plain; but the truth is, that however simple God's word is,

the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:14).

The neglect of this book, even by professing Christians, is very sad, notwithstanding it is our Lord's last letter to His beloved servants — God's last written communication to man — and that it is prefaced with,

Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand (Rev. 1:3).

Dear friends, how is it that we so neglect the Revelation of Jesus Christ?

It is wonderful how God blesses the reading of this book. Many a soul has been awakened through reading or hearing the things that are therein written; many a troubled conscience has been quieted and comforted by seeing, in the visions of glory there presented to us, that redeemed sinners are around the throne of God solely on the ground of the blood of the Lamb; while others have been preserved from ten thousand snares of the devil, by keeping the things that are written therein. Nothing shows more plainly the real importance of this book than the command in the last chapter,

Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand (Rev. 22:10);

and also,

Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book (Rev. 22:7).

What are we to understand by keeping the sayings of the prophecy of this book? Surely this book does not present to us a list of absolute commands to be obeyed, like the law of Moses did. No. It does, however, present to us the working out in result of the great principles seen around us, and so shows us the difference between truth and error, the bride and the harlot, Christ and Satan, in such astonishing ways, that it greatly helps and guides us in our heavenward journey, when we keep those sayings in our minds, before our eyes, and in our hearts.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ is divided into three parts.

1. The things which John saw.
2. The things which are.
3. The things which shall be after these.

The verse before us is among the things which are yet future. The apostle had been carried away into a great and exceeding high mountain, to behold the Bride, the Lamb's wife, and he saw her descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God (Rev. 21:10, 11).

We know, from other Scriptures, that prior to this she will be caught up . . . to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:17).

Now John saw her coming forth in heavenly glory, manifested to the earthly nations; having been made partaker of the grace of God, she now shares with Christ the glory of God. She is presented to us under the symbol of a city. But I do not now propose to enter into that, but immediately proceed to our verse:

And He shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb (Rev. 22:1).

This is still a part of the description of the heavenly Jerusalem; for the next verse speaks of the street of it (Rev. 22:2),
evidently identifying it with what had gone before in the previous chapter.

But what, I ask, does the water of life represent? Have we any Scripture proof as to what the water of life means? Let us see, and may the Lord graciously help us.

In turning to the gospel by John, it is said of Christ, in the first chapter,

In Him was life (John 1:4),

and that He was

full of grace and truth; (John 1:14)

and in various other Scriptures, life and grace are found together. For instance, in Rom. 5 we read, that

grace reigns, through righteousness, unto eternal life, by

Jesus Christ our Lord.

In 1 Pet. 3:7, we read of

the grace of life.

In Rom. 8:2, of the

Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

My reader will remember how the Lord Himself spoke to the sinful Samaritan woman about the necessity of drinking living water, in order to find peace and joy.

If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water (John 4:10).

Here we see Him who was the life, the dispenser of living water to a sinner dead in trespasses and sins; and He also speaks of the effects of this living water in the soul. Speaking of the water of Jacob's well, He saith,

Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again; but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life (John 4:10).

In the previous chapter our Lord had told Nicodemus the Pharisee, not only of the eternal importance of the new birth, but that it consisted of being born of water and of the Spirit, which was known only to those who believed in the Son of man lifted up; and the chapter concludes with the most positive declaration, that to be without Christ is to be without life. In the fifth of John we have Christ presented to us as the quickener of whom He will, and He declares that he that heareth His word, and believes on Him that sent Him, hath everlasting life, and is passed from death unto life. The resurrection of believers is there called

the resurrection of life (John 5:29);

and the reproof of Christ is, that persons would not come unto Him, that they might have life. In the next chapter we again see Christ as the dispenser of living water — eternal life — promising life for evermore to every one that comes to Him, and saying,

The words that I speak unto you, they are Spirit, and they are life (John 6:63);

and when Peter was asked if he would go away, he exclaimed,

Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life (John 6:68).

The seventh chapter shows us that Christ is the fountain to satisfy the thirsty soul, and also that living water, taken in by faith, sinks deep into the feelings and affections, and is felt to be so precious and abundant, as to flow out copiously to those around.

If any man thirst,

said Jesus,

let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water (John 7:37, 38).

Would that we knew more of this in our day, beloved! Why is it that there is not more testimony to Christ? but because we so little go unto Him and drink. The tenth chapter of John shows us that the sheep have life only through the death of the Good Shepherd, teaching us that Jesus crucified is the only fountain of living water. In the next chapter we see Jesus the life-giver, and raiser of the dead, eminently set forth; while the 12th chapter still more plainly shows us that life and union with Christ could only have come to us through His death.

Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit (John 12:24).

In the 14th chapter Christ is emphatically called

the Life (John 14:6);

and the next chapter shows us that fruit-bearing to the glory of the Father is only by living union with Christ the Life; and to pass on to the 20th chapter, after the person, death, and resurrection of Christ have been set before us, the Holy Ghost, by John, says,

These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name (John 20:31).

The water of life, then, is God's blessed grace unto life eternal, flowing out to man as a sinner through Christ, whether a profligate Samaritan, or an outwardly decent Pharisee. Like the river in Eden was to water the ground, so living water is blessing, eternal blessing, to the poor and needy. This seems to me proved from the many Scriptures already quoted; and perhaps the endless occupation and joy of the Church of God will be perpetually drinking this living water; ever having unfolded to us more and more of the love of God, and our souls ever rejoicing before Him with fullness of joy, when we shall sing —

“For ever of His grace, For ever of His love”;

being abundantly satisfied with the fatness of His house, and made to drink of the river of His pleasure: for the Lamb Himself will be to us a fountain of living water.

But let us look a little more carefully at our verse, and notice first the ORIGIN of this living water — proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb (Rev. 22:1).

God is the God of grace, and Jesus Christ is full of grace. Grace, like every other good gift, is from above, and it flows to us through Jesus crucified, risen, and ascended; as we sometimes sing —

“To Jesus we our praises bring, For grace proceeds from Him.”

Many confound grace in them with the grace brought to them, and they have not peace. They must look clean out of themselves, and receive righteousness and peace from God through the Lord Jesus Christ. They will find their conscience purged only by His blood. We must first drink living water, before it can spring up in us, or flow out from us. We must receive grace for us to have peace in us.

The grace of God that bringeth salvation (Titus 2:11);

and when the apostles wrote to their fellow-Christians, they usually commenced with

Grace unto you, and peace, from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ.

Yes, grace proceedeth

out of the throne of God and of the Lamb (Rev.22:1).

It is eternal in its source, and carries our thoughts back to God's

purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began (2 Tim. 1:9);

and being eternal in its source, it is abundant, unchanging, and everlasting, in its operations; hence we read,

By one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified (Heb. 10:14).

Yea, God Himself is

the God of all grace (1 Pet. 5:10);

and this is the glory of the gospel; it is called

the glorious gospel (or the gospel of the glory), of the blessed God (1 Tim. 1:11).

Could we but look into the heart of the invisible God, we should see thoughts of grace and peace to men as sinners, counsels of eternal redemption between the persons of the Godhead, pardon for the guilty, salvation for the lost. Jesus came to manifest this, and His death upon the cross was the outflowing of divine grace; a

pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb (Rev. 22:1).

Happy those who drink freely!

2. Observe that the water is living; it is called

water of life.

Ah, dear reader, nothing less than life, life eternal, could meet the need of those who were dead in trespasses and sins. The law could not make us righteous, or give us life; it only made manifest our sin. But Jesus came to give life. He was the overflowing fountain of living water, and whosoever drank

passed from death unto life (John 5:24).

It is not life for a day or two, like the manna was to the hungry Israelites; no! it is everlasting life that Christ dispenses. He could say,

Oh, the depths of the riches of the grace of God! There is not only mercy with God, but with Him is plenteous redemption (Psa. 130:7).

The figure of a river is very beautiful. Its origin is hidden, but the further you trace it from its source, the wider and deeper it becomes. So is the grace of God in Christ; yea, Jesus is full of grace. We none of us know much of its depth, and height, and length, and breadth; but this we know, that the longer we live, the more we feel that we need the glorious truths of the sovereign and unchanging grace of God to sustain us, and the more we enter into its vastness. And so we believe it will be; for yesterday the Holy Spirit said,

He giveth more grace (James 4:6);

to-day He says,

He giveth more grace;
to-morrow it will be,
He giveth more grace;
He that eateth of this bread shall live for ever (John 6:58),
never see death (John 8:51),
never perish (John 10:28),
not come into condemnation, &c. (John 5:24).

In Ezek. 47, where we find a counterpart of the heavenly Jerusalem, in the prophetic testimony concerning the earthly Jerusalem, we read that

every thing shall live whithersoever the river cometh (see Ezek. 47:9);

and so is the Lord Jesus who was crucified. You cannot come to Him, dear reader, for salvation without living for ever.

He that cometh to me,
saith Jesus,

shall never hunger; and He that believeth in me shall never thirst (John 6:35).

Oh, beloved friends, this is a deep reality! Receiving Christ into the heart as a Savior is always connected with present comfort, and eternal blessing. A sense of peace, the new birth, present possession of life eternal, are connected with drinking living water—

If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature (it is new creation, 2 Cor. 5:17).

We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren (1 John 3:14).

Oh, ye feeble-minded, halting, fainting, doubting, fearing children of God! be comforted, be happy, be assured by the word of the living God, that you live for ever, because you believe on the Lord Jesus; you have tasted the grace of God in Christ, you have drank the living water, and your heart goes upward to the blood-stained mercy-seat, outward in love to God's people, and onward to the coming glory waiting for God's Son from heaven. Fear not; Jesus now intercedes for you in heaven.

3. This water is also abundant; not a pool, but a "river," as Ezekiel's river,
a river to swim in, a river that cannot be passed over (see Ezek. 47:5).

and the next day still it will be,

He giveth more grace;

and so on, until we see Jesus face to face, and find ourselves eternally happy in the bosom of His matchless grace.

4. But notice further, that this water is also pure. There is sometimes mercy among men when guilt is proved, and the stain not cleansed. A prisoner is proved guilty of a capital offence and condemned to die; but just before the expected execution a reprieve is sent, and though the prisoner's life is spared, the stain of guilt remains — there is pardon, but not purity. But the grace of God is pure; it is clean, and makes clean. Grace reigns through righteousness. God is just, and the justifier of him that believeth. God is pure, Christ is pure, the believer is pure — his heart is purified by faith; he is cleansed from all sin, justified from all things.

Again, God's grace is pure, because of its perfection. It is not a mixture of man's doings and God's work, not a compound of law and grace, but pure grace, the simple outflowing of the heart of the pure and holy God, freely giving remission of sins to every one that believeth, because Christ has died upon the cross under the judgment of our sins. Oh, dear children of God, do not try to join together law and gospel! There is an amazing distinction between them. No two things can more differ.

The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ (John 1:17).

The deadliest cup of poison that Satan can present to a sinner is a mixture of law and gospel. The mixture sets aside both law and gospel. Blessed be God, the water of life is pure; let us beware of any corruption of the pure doctrine of the unmerited love of God.

5. Lastly, the water of life is presented to us as

clear as crystal (Rev. 22:1);

which, I apprehend, teaches us not only that it is pure and transparent, but also that it is glorious. When John saw the holy city, it was

like unto a stone most precious — even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal (Rev. 21:11).

Ah, dear reader, the grace of God is truly glorious; hence we read of the glory of His grace (Eph. 1:6).

The Lord will give grace and glory (Psa. 84:11).

There is majesty in grace; for heaven's throne is called the throne of grace (Heb. 4:16).

Yes, it flows from the eternal counsels of God, and redounds to His eternal glory; and in ages yet to come He will show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. The Lamb will be ever loving and ever refreshing His people.

"There we shall see His face,

And never, never sin;

There, from the rivers of His grace,

Drink endless pleasures in."

And now, dear Christians, let us remind each other that salvation is by grace alone, from first to last.

By grace are ye saved through faith (Eph. 2:8).

Here let us abide. Our eternal occupation will be drinking more deeply these streams of living water; then let us now, under the Spirit's teaching, seek to learn more and more of the love of our God to us. This alone will cheer us when sad, and lift us up when faint, keep us humble before God, make us sympathizing and tender toward others, and strong for the service of God and conflict with Satan. Grace alone enables us to bring forth fruit unto God.

The grace of God that bringeth salvation . . . teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world, looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ, &c. (Titus 2:11-14).

Oh, beloved! this pure river is ever flowing, and when we feel barren and dark, it is not because God hath forgotten to be gracious, but because we have forgotten His grace. Oh, think often of the riches of grace! Surely it is a river to swim in, a river that cannot be passed over. There is no sinking here; for

He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might He increaseth strength (Isa. 40:29).

Oh to be

strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 2:1)!

for —

“Though all things change, He changeth not,

He ne'er forgets, though oft forgot;

His love's unchangeably the same,

And as enduring as His name.”

Now let me address myself to the unconverted. You have heard of the Lord Jesus Christ who was crucified for sinners, as the Giver of living water, and be assured that there is salvation in no other. Like the rock that was smitten in the wilderness, to give water to the thirsty people to save them from death, so Christ who was crucified is a river of life, and every needy soul that comes to Him finds it to be so of a truth. Are you, my reader, thirsting for forgiveness of sins, and peace with God? Are you not saying, Oh that I could find rest for my troubled conscience? If so, come just as you are to the Lord Jesus Christ, and receive those eternal blessings that God so freely gives to sinners. Like the prophet to Israel, we are ready to cry,

Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price (Isa. 55:1).

But I fear you are a careless sinner; you hear as if you heard not. You do not care to come to Christ that you might have life. Oh, you little think that Jesus said,

He that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him (John 3:36).

Oh, Christless soul! remember that

the wrath of God abideth on you (see John 3:36).

You may lie down on your bed this night and sleep, but, alas! the wrath of God abideth on you. You may go to your business or pleasure on the morrow with a smiling countenance, but the wrath of God abideth on you. Time may roll over you, and you may find yourself on a sick bed; kind friends wait upon you, and smooth your dying pillow; but you have no consolation — the wrath of God abideth on you. Your weakness increases, your limbs rapidly emaciate, your strength declines quickly, your flesh quivers, the joints of your back are loosed, your breathing becomes more and more difficult, and, solemn to relate, when the vital chord is snapped by the chilly hand of death, then you will awfully and eternally prove that the wrath of God abideth on you. Oh that you may now take warning, and flee from the wrath to come! Do you not know that almost the last words in the Bible are,

Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely (Rev. 22:17)?

If, when thirsty, you passed near some sparkling, crystal-like fountain of water, and saw it labelled, "Drink freely," would you not taste the pure, clear stream? Then why will you any longer reject the water of life? why will you be deaf to that loving voice which says,

I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely (Rev. 21:6)?

"This fountain, though rich, from charge is quite free,

The poorer the wretch, the welcomer he;

Here's strength for the weakly that hither are led,

Here's health for the sickly, here's life for the dead.

"This fountain in vain has never been tried;

It takes out all stains wherever applied;

The water flows sweetly with virtue divine,

To cleanse souls completely, though leprous as mine."

Oh, my reader, Jesus is quickly coming! If you do not turn to Him now, He will, He must, come upon you with fiery wrath; for He will soon

be revealed . . . from heaven in flaming fire (2 Thess. 1:7, 8).

Death and Judgment Past for the Believer

And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation (Heb. 9:27, 28).

There are three different appearings of the Lord spoken of at the end of this chapter. We read of Christ having appeared at the end of the world — the end of the ages — to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself (Heb. 9:26). You see it was not simply to make a way for the sinner that Christ died, but to do what nothing else ever did or could do — to put away sin; and so completely has this been done, that we read elsewhere of sins being purged, blotted out, cast into the depths of the sea, cast behind God's back, never more to be remembered, and the like, to show us God's estimate of the value of Christ's work. Some say that they must every now and then look at their sins; but how much better is it to look to Jesus, and see how completely they have been

put away!

Observe, the Scripture says,

PUT AWAY!

Then you find Christ spoken of as appearing somewhere now. Where is it? In heaven. He is gone back again to the Father, gone into heaven with that which has accomplished our eternal redemption. He entered into heaven itself by His own blood. He is there as a great High Priest for all believers. He is only a High Priest for such: the unbeliever is far from God. Jesus, then, is now appearing in the presence of God for us. He is our righteousness, life, redemption, so that we appear before God as He is; we are perfect in Christ Jesus.

Then we have another appearing mentioned in the closing words of the chapter, which is yet future, though we know not how very near it may be; but I shall hope to refer to that soon. Meanwhile, I would call attention to the very solemn truth recorded in Heb. 9:27, 28:

As it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many.

The *as* and *so* here are very emphatic.

Death and judgment are God's appointments for men, because they are sinners. The divine verdict is not only that

all have sinned (Rom. 3:23; 5:12),

but that all are

under sin (Rom. 7:14) — servants of sin (Rom. 6:17; 20);

so that sin to the natural man is something agreeable to his nature; hence we read of the

pleasures of sin (Heb. 11:25).

Death is the result of sin, and so is judgment; and what can God's condemnation of sin be but eternal? Hence we read of the

second death (Rev. 21:8),

the lake of fire. Death, then, is God's just sentence on men because of sin —

the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23).

There was one Man here on whom death had no claim, because in Him was no sin; sin having been laid upon Him, sin in the flesh was condemned in Himself, and He died; but He saw no corruption.

It was not possible that He should be holden of death (see Acts 2:24).

This was the spotless, holy Jesus, the Savior of sinners.

Men know they must die, and therefore try to make it, by comfortable circumstances, as agreeable as they can; but they cannot bear to think of "judgment." Nevertheless, it is God's appointment, and cannot be altered. Men are exposed to death and judgment; for they are under the dominion of sin as well as the guilt of sin; they are, therefore,

servants of sin (Rom. 6:17; 20),

and

the wages of sin is death.

This is very plain. It is not simply the death of the body; but if a man die in his sins, he will be raised again, and judged for those sins before the great white throne, and then cast into the lake of fire, the second death of everlasting darkness and misery. Those of you, therefore, who are still in your sins are going on to death and judgment — God's appointments. How can you bear the thought of being judged by the light of God's infinite holiness and unchanging hatred to sin?

We have here, as it were, two parallel columns. The one headed "men," and having written under it "death" and "judgment"; the other headed,

them that look for Him (Heb. 9:28)

— "believers," and under that is written, "Christ put away their sins, and consequently delivered them from death and judgment." How wide the contrast! The one clouded with darkness and misery, the other bright with light and glory. Observe the as and so. As death and judgment were the doom of men because of sin, so Christ bore the sins, and death and judgment. He bore

the sins of many (Heb. 9:28).

How blessed is the portion of those who have Christ for their Savior!

I would now, my friends, ask if you have received Jesus the Son of God as your Savior? I do not ask if you have good intentions; for I believe multitudes intend to go to heaven who are still treading the broad road to destruction; neither do I ask if you have some knowledge of the

doctrines of Christ; but I do ask if you have received Him? You may say, I pray more, give more, deny myself more, and the like; but that is not the question. To know Christ, and take Him as your very own Savior, because there is no other, knowing you must perish in eternal misery without Him because of your sins, this is the vital question. For it is not knowing doctrines, or giving alms, or saying prayers, that can deliver you from death and judgment, but Jesus the Son of God, and Jesus only.

As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God (John 1:12).

Whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish (see John 3:15).

Or, as the blessed Lord said in another place,

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation (or judgment) (John 5:24).

Blessed deliverance! Happy indeed are those who, having simply received Christ as their Savior, can rest their heads on their pillows in sweetest confidence and peace, knowing that their sins were purged by the sacrifice of Christ, and that they will not come into judgment. Such are already on the other side of death.

They have passed from death unto life (see John 5:24; 1 John 3:14).

The believer, then, is delivered from what every unbeliever is exposed to — death and judgment. How is it that he is delivered from death? for do not we see that saints die just the same as sinners? They may appear to as to their bodies; but the wages of sin is not simply the separation of soul and body, but there is a “sting” and “terror” connected with death that knows no rest or solace. The believer is so completely delivered from these things that he can say,

O death, where is thy sting? (1 Cor. 15:55)

for the sting of death being

sin (1 Cor. 15:56),

it is removed by the precious blood of Christ, which cleanseth from all sin. The “terror,” too, is gone, because he knows that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. The believer’s death, therefore, is not called death in the New Testament, but falling asleep in Jesus. Hence, too, the blessed Lord said,

If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death (John 8:51) —

he shall never taste of death (John 8:52).

Blessed, glorious fact, that the soul that has accepted Christ for its Savior is so completely delivered from death, that, when Jesus comes, those who are alive will at once, in a moment, be changed, and caught up into the air to meet Him!

As to “judgment,” nothing can be more contrary to the teaching of Scripture than to suppose that saints are going to be judged as to whether they shall have eternal life or not. I refer to the wrong use made of our Lord’s teaching on the sheep and the goats. On referring to it (Matt. 25:31-46),

you will see that there is no idea of resurrection there, not one dead person raised; but, instead of that, it is the King coming here, and judging the nations as to how they dealt with His brethren, a remnant of Jews who will go forth with the gospel of the kingdom after we have been caught up at the Lord's coming. It is Christ assembling and judging living people. Nothing can be more opposed to the precious truth, that every believer now has everlasting life, is a child of God, is passed from death unto life, than the false idea of God's children going to be judged. That every believer will appear before the judgment seat, or bema, of Christ is quite true; but there will be no question of salvation then, but of reward for service; and we shall appear there like Christ in glorified bodies.

It is most blessed, then, to see that God teaches us that death and judgment have been already met for us by Jesus on the cross, and that which is before us is not, as some say, a day of judgment, a great assize, to decide who shall be saved and who not; for I affirm that Scripture nowhere teaches us to expect that, but to expect Christ. Hence Heb. 9:28 concludes with, and to them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

There will be no question with Christ and believers about sin, and therefore not of its consequences — death and judgment. Christ will then put forth His redemption power on our bodies, and thus not only give us full and everlasting deliverance from sorrow and all the consequences of sin, but, in a moment, change our vile bodies, and fashion them like unto His glorious body, so that we may have full capacities for ceaseless and untiring enjoyment of Himself. Blessed hope indeed! Precious portion! now children of God, delivered from death and judgment, and having the blessed hope of being for ever with the Lord, and for ever like Him! The believer is therefore instructed to look back on the cross, and see that Christ there put away his sins, and delivered him from death and judgment; to look up to the throne, and see Jesus now appearing in God's presence for him, his righteousness and great High Priest; and to look for His coming to bring him into eternal enjoyment with Himself.

In a moment, like a lightning flash, and the twinkling of an eye, He will change these vile bodies, and then at once our grateful hearts, loosed for ever from every bond, will burst forth in one eternal anthem of praise —

Worthy is the Lamb (Rev. 5:12).

Now, if we sing a few hymns, nature grows weary, and admonishes us that it is enough; but then it will be untiring and unending worship and delight in the Lord Jesus. We even now feel that nothing is comparable to Jesus. If the world were to pile up all its wealth, or gather together all its pleasures, or concentrate all its honors, and present them to a child of God, his reply would be — Jesus only can satisfy me.

I ask you then, dear friends, have you delight in Jesus? Is He precious to your souls? He is the Father's delight, and all intelligences in heaven are in subjection to Him. If you, then, cannot find delight in the Lord Jesus, how can you be fit for the Father's company? Christ loves me; He loved me when dead in trespasses and sins. I know this; therefore I can say,

Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly (Rev. 22:20)!

His coming again has no terror for me, but delight. Oh, how blessed it will be to find oneself in a moment brought into a region of eternal life, eternal love, eternal glory, and, more than that, to

have capacities for its unceasing enjoyment! How blessed, then, is the promise, that unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation (Heb. 9:28).

The Pharisee and the Publican

Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted (Luke 18:10-14).

The Lord knew what was in man. His words were powerful and heart-searching. He always distinguished between the lip-service of outward formality, and the inward exercise of the conscience before God. In that day, like the present, many erred because they knew not the Scriptures, nor the power of God; they believed not the truth of man's total ruin and depravity; consequently they were constantly thinking of doing something to secure the favour of God, or of bringing something of creature-merit for acceptance, instead of confessing themselves to be lost, undone sinners, and justly deserving His eternal wrath. The people, therefore, could not understand Jesus; they saw no beauty in Him; they were continually mistaking His words, and perceived not that He was exactly suited to do them good, because He came to seek and to save that which was lost.

In the chapter before us, our blessed Lord was addressing the Pharisees. The subject of His discourse was prayer. He exposed their hypocritical way of approaching God, and showed the amazing difference between saying prayers and true prayer. Their prayers might have general approval among men, but what were they in the sight of God? He had just spoken of the ungodliness that would characterize the world when the Son of man is revealed so destitute would it be of vital reality, that it could only be compared to the days before the flood, and the days of Lot. He then set before them the parable of the

unjust judge (Luke 18:6),

teaching them that

men ought always to pray, and not to faint (Luke 18:1);

assuring them also that God is the hearer of prayer, and cannot but avenge His own elect in answer to their cries; and asked the most solemn question,

When the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth? (Luke 18:8)

But while thus giving expression to the doctrine, that

men ought always to pray,

He set before them, in the parable of the Pharisee and publican, the great contrast between formal lip-service and true prayer.

This must have been a powerful appeal to the consciences of the self-righteous. Most men acknowledge that they should pray. Not to pray is an omission that people generally would condemn; indeed, it is almost a law among all nations, that everybody should pray. Idolaters invoke their gods. Mohammedans have fixed hours for saying their prayers. Socinians own that people should pray. Jews say prayers. Roman Catholics repeat prayers. Pharisees make long prayers for a pretence; and Saul of Tarsus excelled in this religion; but after he had seen the Lord Jesus, it was said of him,

Behold, he prayeth (Acts 9:11)!

A prayerless soul is in a sadly infidel state; for surely it is the duty of every intelligent creature to acknowledge the goodness of the Creator. But there is a difference between a prayerless man, and a man who owns God as his Creator and Benefactor; yet both may be dead in trespasses and sins. The former is infidel, not owning God more than the unintelligent brute; the latter acknowledges God in his ways of creation and providence, yet, failing to own God's grace in redemption, he is still unpardoned and unsaved. Many will speak of the kindness of God in providence, who believe not the glorious gospel of Christ for salvation, and are, therefore, still in their sins — condemned already.

For this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil (see John 3:19).

He that believeth on THE SON hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not THE SON shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him (John 3:19, 36).

The parable of the Pharisee and publican presents to us a most striking sketch of the two classes of persons which are spread over a large portion of the globe; namely, those who make prayers, and those who really pray, and is accompanied with the Divine estimate of both.

Outwardly, there was a great similarity between the Pharisee and the publican. The Gentile idolater might have seen both wending their way to the same temple; they both went to pray; they both began their prayers with "God"; in the eyes of men they were both pursuing the same object; unlike those who were without, they were inner-court worshipers. Like the mere formalist and real Christian now, there is often outwardly little difference, but, in God's esteem, how very wide the contrast!

1. Let us consider the PHARISEE. I think I see him with his broad phylactery, hastening through the crowded streets, often gratified by salutations of "Rabbi"; stopping now and then at the corner to repeat his accustomed prayer, and out-stripping many a broken-hearted publican. At length he approaches the holy temple. How boldly he enters! How unhesitatingly he walks straight up to the innermost part of the holy place! How erect he stands! How often his eye glances on the gazing multitude, to be sure that he has secured their admiration and esteem! and how scornfully he views the weeping sinners that surround him! Then begins his prayer,

God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess (Luke 18:11, 12).

Such is the Pharisee's prayer. We are told that he

prayed thus with himself (Luke 18:11);

all the resources of self are therefore called to his aid: hence his prayer is full of self — self-exaltation, self-love, self-righteousness. He says,

I thank thee — I am not as other men — I fast — I give — I — possess.

All through his prayer “I” stands most prominent. Self, whatever form it may assume, can never rise above self. He thanks God that he is better than others. How is it that he is better than other men? Is it not that his fasting and alms-giving have accomplished this? Then why thank God? Is it not like Cain’s offering of those fruits of the ground that his own hand had cultivated, and which had been matured by Divine aid? Yes, this is the delusion of Pharisaism. It is the cultivation of self, but professedly by Divine help. It is not salvation; it is not the cleansing of the guilty conscience; but the outward trimming of the corrupt tree which cannot bring forth good fruit, and sets at nought the gospel declaration, that

except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God (John 3:3).

The Pharisee thanks God he is not as other men. God declares that all have sinned, all have gone astray, all are guilty before Him, and that

as face answereth to face in water, so doth the heart of man to man (see Prov. 27:19).

It is quite possible that the Pharisee might have been preserved from the outward sins which the publican had so long pursued, and which many around him were frequently reveling in; but he little thought that

God seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart (see 1 Sam. 16:7).

The Pharisee knew not the sin of honoring God with his lips, while his heart was far from Him. What was the state of the Pharisee’s heart? He spoke as if he were righteous, and had never sinned. This was not true; for the Scripture saith,

There is none righteous, no, not one (Rom. 3:10),

and that we are all as an unclean thing, conceived in sin, and shapen in iniquity. His thought, like that of many now, was, that it was only outward things that defiled the man; whereas our Lord said that it was the evil things from within that defiled the man:

For out of the heart of men proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from within, and they defile the man (see Mark 7:21-23).

Was not the Pharisee, then, an “extortioner” in heart? Had he not, times without number, desired and obtained God’s providential mercies, under the pretense of honoring God, when it had really been for self-exaltation in the sight of men? Was he not “unjust” not to credit the testimony of the holy and true Son of God? Was he not an “adulterer” in heart, in pretending affection for God, calling the living and true God his God, while he was wholly set on exalting and adoring self? Oh deluded Pharisee! Oh unregenerate, unpardoned, sinful man! how hath Satan blinded thine eyes!

how hath thine own evil heart deceived thee! Well hath the Lord said of thee,

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity (Matt. 23:27, 28).

Such is the Pharisee's prayer. There was no sense of need expressed; no expectation of receiving any thing from God; no felt unworthiness; no repentance; no confession of sin. His thought was that God required something from him, and he flattered himself that he was competent to meet it. He knew not the truth, that

God is not worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed any thing, seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; — and, commandeth all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:25; 29).

2. Now look at THE PUBLICAN. Here you see a man exercised, not about what he is in the sight of men, but what he is before God; and this is always the way of the Holy Spirit in the soul. The publican knows it is to God, from whom no secrets are hid, that he must give an account. With a trembling step and an aching heart he enters the temple. He feels deep contrition, and is bowed down under a sense of unworthiness of the least of God's mercies, and

standing afar off (Luke 18:13),

the question with him is, How can I approach God? for

"The best obedience of my hands

Dares not appear before His throne."

He knows that he is

a sinner (Luke 18:13),

that he has actually transgressed against God's laws. He is self-convicted, and therefore self-abased. His past acts of covetousness and extortion stare him in the face, and he is conscious that all sin is really "against God."

Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight (Psa. 51:4),

is the utterance of his heart. He feels he cannot look up, not even

lift up so much as his eyes to heaven (Luke 18:13);

for he knows God is holy and just, that He will by no means clear the guilty, and has power to destroy both body and soul in hell, and he is deeply conscious of having broken His commands. But, more than this, He traces sin to its source. He laid his trembling hand upon his heart,

he smote upon his breast (see Luke 18:13),

as much as to say, What horrid thoughts, vile desires, and abominable suggestions, lurk within this breast! O wretched man that I am! O foul transgressor! ungrateful enemy to God! What mercies

have been vouchsafed to me! what a kind Benefactor! yet how rebellious and disobedient have I been, to have wasted my time, health, strength, and every other talent in selfish objects; yea, even using the Almighty's gifts to seek happiness and glory, apart from the Giver. What ungodliness! what sin! But language fails to describe these workings of the Spirit in the conscience.

The question, then, in the publican's heart is, Can such a sinner be saved? Is there any hope of salvation for one so deserving God's wrath? If there be, he is convinced it can only be in God Himself; for the experience he has had of his own weakness and vileness excludes all hope from himself. The only possibility is in Divine mercy. Can God, will God, be merciful to such a sinner? He has heard that God is merciful, and he feels that mercy only can meet his need; but he cries —

“Depth of mercy, can there be

Mercy still reserved for me?”

This is his anxious inquiry. He, however, ventures; he casts himself on free, unmerited love; his cry is,

God, be merciful to me a sinner (Luke 18:13)!

Mark the character of this prayer:

1st, His supplication is to “God.”

2nd, He acknowledges his guilt as “a sinner.”

3rd, His only ground of expectation is in Divine mercy — “be merciful.”

4th, His deep, heartfelt personal necessity —

be merciful to me (Luke 18:13).

He brings nothing but a load of sin to be removed, a conscience oppressed with guilt to be cleansed, an agonizing breast to be comforted, a needy soul to be filled. He presents no creature-merit to God, and he expects everything from God. He feels, if God does not save him, he is lost for ever:

God be merciful to me a sinner (Luke 18:13)!

How widely different are the two prayers! The self-exalting Pharisee needs nothing, the self-abased publican needs everything; the one is ensnared in the trammels of dead formality, the other is under the influence of spiritual life.

3. THE DIVINE VERDICT. Having set before us a sample of these two wide-spread classes of persons which have been in the world ever since the days of Cain, our blessed Lord then tells us that the publican

went down to his house JUSTIFIED (Luke 18:14).

This is clearly the meaning of the passage. It is not that the Pharisee was in any degree justified; but comparing the two persons, the publican could be spoken of as JUSTIFIED. How blessed! What a glorious unfolding of the riches of the grace of God! A self-condemned sinner, thus casting

himself on the free, sovereign mercy of God, JUSTIFIED! And surely this has always been God's way. In the days of Job, Elihu was instructed by the Spirit to say of the Almighty,

He looketh upon men; and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not, He

will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light (Job 33:27, 28).

But to be justified means not only forgiven, but to be accounted righteous — to be just before God. To this end Christ died and rose again.

He who knew no sin was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (see 2 Cor. 5:21).

Thus Jesus, by His finished work, has not only delivered His people from guilt, but fitted them for glory; hence the Colossian believers were enjoined to

give thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son: in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins (Col. 1:12-14).

This is the work that Jesus came forth from the Father to accomplish,

that He might present to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing (Eph. 5:27).

This is the mercy of God to sinful man. He justifies the ungodly that believe; and this He is able to do consistently with His own holiness and justice, through the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The only sacrifice for sin had not been offered when Jesus put forth this parable. He tells us on another occasion that He was

straitened,

that is, that He was unable fully to tell out the grace and peace of God to lost, sinful man, until His death had actually taken place. He said,

I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished (Luke 12:50).

But God's purposes and thoughts of redeeming mercy have always been the same. He could account Abel, Noah, Abraham, righteous by faith, by looking forward to the cross, as much as He now justifies a sinner who looks back on Christ's already accomplished work. By Christ, all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses (Acts 13:39). But further. Our Lord adds to this parable the Divine statute, that

every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted (Luke 18:14).

On two other occasions our Lord put forth the same solemn declaration; but both were in reference to seeking honor and distinction among men. Here, however, He sets it before His hearers as a

doctrine of eternal importance. Every one that exalteth himself, by professing to stand on the ground of carnal confidence, self-righteousness, and self-importance, can only be judged by God as worthy of eternal banishment from His presence. To stand before God without the wedding garment, without that spotless and infinitely perfect righteousness that Christ is to every one that believeth, is to be exposed to the just indignation of the King of kings, who must abase such, and whose sentence must be,

Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 22:13).

How deep, how eternally full of bitter anguish will that abasing be! On the other hand,

He that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

Such do not contend for their own opinion about the things of God; they boast not of their own abilities or attainments; they believe that

God is greater than man (Job 33:12);

they lay aside their own thoughts; they give God His due place; they incline their ear to Him, and hearken to His word. Taught by His Spirit, and enlightened by the word of truth, they acknowledge that all their righteousnesses are as filthy rags, and confess that they are unclean and undone. Such God will exalt; for

He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory (1 Sam. 2:8).

In this present life, they receive a garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, and the oil of joy for mourning; they are consciously exalted from the degraded gratifications of carnal lusts to the enjoyment of fellowship with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ; even now they are exalted from the slavery of Satan's bondage to liberty and sonship in the presence of God; and when the Lord Jesus shall come again, while many are left behind for His terribly abasing judgments, they shall be exalted to share His throne of glory. They shall see His face, be like Him, and share His glory for ever. How high, how holy, how perfect, and unchangeably happy will this exaltation be!

Now, dear reader, let me affectionately ask you solemnly to ponder these things. Are you a prayerless soul? Do you eat, and drink, and enjoy the bounties of God in nature and providence, without ever bowing your knees to Him in acknowledgment of His mercies? Is it really so? Then wherein do you differ from the poor heathen, or from

the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth? (Eccl. 3:21).

You say, I make no profession! What! God blesses you day by day with such providential mercies, and, far beyond all that, has sent His only-begotten Son to die for sinners, and save them from the wrath to come, by shedding His own precious blood, and yet you make no profession! as if such wondrous love and grace were beneath your dignity to notice! Fie! fie! my reader! Repent at once, turn to God, and accept pardon for thine ingratitude and sin, through the atoning death, the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But perhaps my reader may say, "I am not a prayerless person. I could not lie down at night, or get up in the morning, without saying my accustomed prayers. I never commence a meal without repeating grace, and I must own that God has greatly blessed me in my family, business, and property." Ah, my dear reader, all this may be quite true; but about your soul — your soul — your undying soul! Are you not resting in your accustomed religious duties, and owning God in His dealings with you in providence, but not owning the mercy of God in saving sinners by the death of His Son, thus neglecting your soul's salvation? Oh! what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? You may acknowledge God, but do you believe in His Son Jesus Christ, as a lost sinner, for the salvation of your soul? This is the all- important question.

But some of my readers may say, "Neither of these describes my case. I try to pray, and cannot. I am often afraid to sleep at night, lest I should awake in hell; and when sometimes I see the lightning flash, and hear the thunder roar, I fear it may be Christ coming in judgment to cut me off. I had serious impressions when a child; but they passed away, and I lived in sin for many years. Others speak of happiness, but I spend weeks and months in sorrow. Sometimes I feel better, and then again sin and guilt are fastened deeper than ever upon my conscience. I have been advised to attach myself to some church (as it is called); but knowing that a profession without the power of godliness is abominable in the sight of God, and feeling that it is inward peace, a sense of forgiveness of sins and acceptance with God, that I need, I have always declined."

My reader! if this be thy experience, the Holy Spirit hath been working in thy heart. He proclaims in the gospel the free mercy of God, full forgiveness of sins, everlasting righteousness, and salvation to the uttermost, to every sinner that cometh to God through Christ.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved (Acts 16:31).

Take thy stand at Calvary's cross; there read in the shedding of His blood the unutterable mercy of God to sinners. Doubt no more. Lift thy soul to heaven's throne of grace where Jesus is. Confess thyself to be a lost sinner, take the living God at His word, rely only upon the Savior's death for acceptance and peace, and thy groans will soon be turned to praise, and thy burdened heart be filled with songs of joy.

Once more! Remember that Jesus Christ came into the world to SAVE — who? Not righteous persons, but SINNERS!

The Cleansing of the Leper

Leviticus 14:1-8.

The ordinance in Israel of the cleansing of the leper gives us a touching picture of God's way of cleansing a sinner, and bringing him back into His own blessed presence to worship and serve before Him.

Leprosy was a remarkable type of sin. It entirely unfitted a man for the presence of God. His place was

without the camp (Lev. 13:46).

Whether he had few spots or many, he was pronounced utterly unclean (Lev. 13:44).

All that he could therefore truly say of himself was,

Unclean, unclean (Lev. 13:45).

The disease was most defiling. God alone could make a leper clean, and fit to come into the camp.

The true place therefore of a leper was outside the camp of Israel, outside every thing of God — His presence, His service, His worship; with rent garments, head uncovered, and upper lip tied up, calling out,

Unclean!

lest any coming near should contract defilement.

It is well for any now who take this self-loathing place, as without God, unclean, and undone before Him, unfit for His presence. Surely it is the only true place; for we are told, that

they that are in the flesh cannot please God (Rom. 8:8),

that all

are guilty before Him (see Rom. 3:19).

God, however, could meet the leper in this foul and hopeless condition, and bring him back into the camp cleansed, and fit for His presence. And in this ordinance we see great principles shadowed forth, as to the way in which God has met us in our sin and guilt, fitted us for His own blessed presence, and made us to find rest and peace before Him in love.

1st. THE LEPER WAS BROUGHT UNTO THE PRIEST (Lev. 13:2). Wherever else he went, or to whatever person, it would be wholly unavailing. Out of all the people in the world, this one, and he only, had power from God to deal with the leprosy, and pronounce him clean. So we know that there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we can be saved, but the name

of Jesus Christ. Jesus only is the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by Him. The sinner must have to do with the Lord Jesus about his sins, or be outside God's presence for ever. There is salvation in no other. Jesus says,

Come (Matt. 11:28)!

Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out (John 6:37).

How clear and encouraging this is!

2ndly. HE WAS EXAMINED BY THE PRIEST —

The priest shall look and behold if the plague of leprosy be healed (Lev. 14:3).

The leper stood with his leprous spots exposed to the scrutinizing eye of God's priest. Dealing with God, through Christ, about our sin is no light matter. It is a deeply solemn experience, to fall under the searching eye of God in His infinitely holy presence. To feel oneself a sinner before a sin-hating God, can only be endured by the knowledge of the fact that He is a sinner-loving God; for all things are naked and open before Him. There is not a secret thing which is not wholly uncovered before His eye.

3rd. CLEANSING ONLY BY THE DEATH OF ANOTHER. The leper had to learn at this solemn moment, that he could be cleansed only by a sacrifice being offered. A live bird was therefore taken, and killed over running or living water; for the death of Christ is connected with the outflowing of eternal life. And surely God teaches the soul that is exercised about his sins before Him, that it is only by the death of Christ that he can be brought to stand in acceptance with Him; for

without blood-shedding there is no remission (Heb. 9:22).

The leper saw, in the suffering and death of the bird, God's way of meeting him in order to cleanse him from his uncleanness. So it is only by the death of Jesus, the Son of God, that the sinner finds peace with God, and cleansing of sin;

for Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God (1 Pet. 3:18).

Then he saw the living bird, with cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop, dipped into the blood of the dead bird: thus in a figure the dead bird is identified with the living bird, in order to be a type of Him who was dead and is alive again, and that for evermore. The dignity or majesty, incorruptibility, perfect humility, and other characteristics of Christ, may be typified by the scarlet, and cedar wood, and hyssop, to show us the infinite power and efficacy of His precious blood.

4th. THE SPRINKLING OF BLOOD. There the leper stood looking at God's work for him, and then receiving God's remedy, and hearing God's sentence. He did nothing to merit any good, but received all from the God of Israel. Feeling his utter uncleanness and unfitness for God's presence, his mouth was stopped, while the priest sprinkled the blood upon him seven times, and pronounced him clean (see Lev. 14:7).

This is most blessed. It touchingly shows us that salvation is of the Lord. It gave perfect assurance to the leper, and left no room for a question. Whatever he felt, or others suggested, he had the consciousness that he was under the power of the blood; and, through that alone, God's Priest had pronounced him clean.

And so the believer now, who simply has to do with Christ — God's only Savior — about his sins, is entitled to perfect peace, entirely on the ground that Christ died for our sins, and put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself; for God's word declares we are now justified by His blood (Rom. 5:9). We are thus pronounced clean.

5th. THE LIVING BIRD IS THEN LET LOOSE, to prefigure a risen Savior.

After he had purged our sins, He sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high (see Heb. 1:3).

So that the resurrection and ascension of Christ give perfect assurance that God was fully satisfied with Christ's atoning work, and that He saw in His death upon the cross an answer to every claim of Divine holiness and justice, and the complete blotting out of the sins of His people. It was not possible that He should be holden (held by) of death — His flesh saw no corruption; but he was counted worthy of all glory, because he had so fully glorified the Father on the earth, and finished, the work that He gave Him to do. Until the leper was cleansed, the living bird was detained; but the efficacy of the dead one being fully attested by the leper being pronounced clean, it was

let loose into the open field (see Lev. 14:7).

What peace and comfort this must have ministered to the poor leper! and what perfect rest of soul the knowledge of Christ risen from the dead and gone into heaven gives us! Surely we can sing

—

6th. THE LEPER CLEANSED HIMSELF. After he was pronounced clean, he cleansed himself and came into the camp. He washed his clothes, shaved off all his hair, and washed himself, and in this way came into the camp. So the believer that has had to do with God about his sins, and has the enjoyment of present forgiveness and cleansing by the blood of Jesus, has no confidence in the flesh; he sees that he himself in the flesh is thoroughly unclean, that every thing connected with him naturally is unclean also, and that all his natural comeliness, all that he formerly gloried in, cannot bear the light of God's presence. But he acknowledges it unclean and unfit for God's eye, and sees it all cleansed by the word of God, which testifies to the everlasting efficacy of the blood of Jesus.

Now,

said Jesus,

ye are clean, through the word which I have spoken unto you (John 15:3).

Made nigh in Christ Jesus, and through His blood, we can, by the Spirit, enjoy God's presence, worship the Father, and serve Him acceptably.

"Clean every whit,"

Thou saidst it, Lord;

Shall one suspicion lurk?

Thine surely is a faithful word,

And Thine a finished work.”

The Good Samaritan

And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour? And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise (Luke 10:25-37).

Christ came into the world to save sinners. He died for the ungodly. Prophets had repeatedly declared that

salvation is of the Lord (Jonah 2:9),
and had long spoken of Jehovah as
a just God and a Saviour (Isa. 45:21).

The gospel prominently sets this forth. He was called Jesus or Savior, because He would
save His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21);

and when the angel of the Lord announced His birth to the shepherds, he said,

Unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord (Luke 2:11).

Jesus Himself taught His disciples that He came,

not to destroy men's lives, but to save them (Luke 9:56);

and when a sin-convicted woman received Him as such, He pronounced her
saved (Luke 7:50);

and when another joyfully received Him, He declared,

This day is salvation come to this house (Luke 19:9).

Paul testified that the grace of God bringeth salvation, and He counted it

a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners (1 Tim. 1:15).

How blessed is the contemplation of the fact, that God still proclaims salvation for the chief of sinners, through the atoning death of Christ! Well may we sing —

“Salvation! let the echo fly

The spacious earth around;

While all the armies of the sky

Conspire to raise the sound.

“Salvation! O thou bleeding Lamb,

To thee the praise belongs;

Salvation shall inspire our hearts,

And dwell upon our tongues.”

It is the fact of God having provided a Savior for sinners that so richly manifests divine love, and when received into the heart by faith, the ruined and lost become attracted to the bosom of God. No one ever could have conceived that God had such love for sinful man as Jesus revealed. To condemn sin in His only-begotten Son, that He might bring us to glory, instead of eternally condemning us, as we so justly deserved, was such a deep thought of unutterable love as the cross of Christ alone could fully set forth.

No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him (John 4:18).

Man's estimate of God generally is, that He is a hard master, demanding and expecting great things from him; hence, when he thinks of God at all, it is commonly associated with the idea of bringing something to God, instead of receiving from Him. Paul met this thought in the idolatrous Athenians, by telling them that

God is not worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed any thing, seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things (see Acts 17:25).

It is this proud thought of man's ability that is such an impenetrable barrier to the entrance of the gospel into the heart, and it is this that the Spirit of God breaks down, by convincing men of their sinfulness and need of a Savior, and showing them that righteousness is to be had only by faith in Him, who is now at the right hand of God.

It is recorded that, on more than one occasion, persons came to Jesus in this erroneous condition of mind. Their enquiry was about doing something to entitle them to eternal life; which served, in the case before us, as a fit opportunity for our Lord to unfold the difference between law and

gospel, and to show that He came, not to call the righteous, but to seek and to save that which was lost.

The touching parable of the good Samaritan was drawn forth by the lawyer's self-righteous enquiry. In the darkness of deep ignorance and idle curiosity, he tempted the Lord with this question:

What shall I do to inherit eternal life? (Luke 10:25).

The point was about doing something to entitle to life; our Savior, therefore, could only refer him to what God had written in the law of Moses, in which it had been repeatedly declared, that the man that doeth these things shall live in them. The vain confidence of this enquirer was best met by thus directing him to God's own standard of righteousness; for when men suppose that they are capable of doing that which will entitle them to eternal life, the just balance of God's law and testimony can alone determine the question. Our Lord's reply, therefore, was —

What is written in the law? how readest thou? (Luke 10:26)

The lawyer's response showed that, like many in the present day, he was acquainted with the letter of the law, while he knew nothing of its killing, condemning power, in laying bare the conscience, and exposing to his view the depravity of his own evil heart. He unhesitatingly answered,

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbour as thyself (Luke 10:27);

to which our Lord replied,

Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live (Luke 10:28).

Thus the righteous balance of God's holy law was brought forth, and the only question was, whether the lawyer, if weighed, would be

found wanting (Dan. 5:27).

He drew forth the required standard himself, and the question was, Did it pronounce him righteous, and entitled to life? or did it prove him to

have sinned, and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23)?

for the heart-searching demand of that law was, to

love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; and thy neighbour as thyself (Luke 10:27).

Thus perfection of devotedness to God, unceasing and unfailing in its continuance, with self-sacrifice for our neighbour's benefit, were involved in the law. Is it not strange that the lawyer did not fall down before such demands, pricked in his heart, and exclaim,

God be merciful to me a sinner (Luke 18:13)?

But he did not. So blind and ignorant is the natural man, that he perceives nothing spiritually, except the Holy Ghost enlighten his understanding and open his heart! The lawyer was still willing to justify himself (Luke 10:29).

How great is the blindness of the human heart! But has it not always been the way of man to seek to excuse and justify himself? Do we not see multitudes around us, having the law of Moses on their lips, but so destitute of the sense of its perfect requirements as to attempt self-justification, by endeavouring to scrape together a righteousness by that very law which so thoroughly proves them to be transgressors, as to be to them a ministration of condemnation and death, so that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God (Rom. 3:19)?

Such is the law. Its demands are strict, its measure perfect, its standard unalterable, inflicting death on the transgressor, without any promise of mercy. Holy, just, and good in itself, but capable of showing man's sinfulness, without giving him life or righteousness; for the Scripture saith,

If righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain (Gal. 2:21).

Who, then, can lay claim to life on the ground of the law? Who can say, I am clean, I am pure, I have never transgressed thy commands at any time? Blessed be God, there was One who could say,

I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do (John 17:4).

Yes,

He magnified the law, and made it honourable (see Isa. 42:21, especially New Trans., JND);

He loved the Lord His God with all His heart, and with all His soul, and with all His mind, and with all His strength; and He proved that He loved His neighbour as Himself, by redeeming him with His own precious blood.

Though the lawyer was so willing to

justify himself (Luke 10:29),

yet he failed to do so, for he was standing before the light of truth; and the proposed question,

Who is my neighbour? (Luke 10:29)

seems to imply that he had some misgiving about being able to meet this part of the law's demands; and when the Lord drew a picture of one loving a neighbour as himself, and added,

Go and do likewise (Luke 10:37),

the lawyer was unable to ask any more questions, for guilt of conscience, under the power of God's holy truth, stopped his mouth. If his heart were opened to receive the blessed instruction set before him, he could not have failed to feel self-condemned, in coming so far short of God's standard of righteousness, and would have perceived in the parable, that Christ had drawn a life-like portrait of himself in the fallen, naked, wounded, needy, half-dead traveller; and that He that was speaking to him was the neighbor ready to bind up his wounds, and pour peace and joy

into his wounded conscience. Thus he would be taught the true secret of the gospel, that while he could not

inherit eternal life (Luke 10:25)

by doing, nevertheless it could be had without money and without price (Isa. 55:1), from the Savior of sinners, as the free gift of God. In contemplating the parable, we may notice:

1. Man's fallen and helpless condition.
2. The inability of law or ordinances to meet his need.
3. The depth and suitability of the Savior's love.
4. The security and prospects of the healed and rescued sinner.

1. MAN'S FALLEN AND HELPLESS CONDITION is most strikingly set before us in the wounded man.

A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead (Luke 10:30).

We are reminded here that man is a fallen creature. God made him upright, and pronounced him, with every other part of creation,

very good (Gen. 1:31).

He was a stranger to guilt, and knew nothing of death's terrible sting; he was clothed with innocence, and no stain had ever soiled his pure mind. But the great enemy came to him, and he disobeyed God's command. This is sin; and in this way he was stripped of his robe of spotless purity; he was sensible of his wickedness, he felt the deep wounds of fear and guilt, and knew that death claimed him, without having any prospect of deliverance. As the Scripture saith,

By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned (Rom. 5:12).

Thus man is a fallen creature, and he is also

without strength (Rom. 5:6);

he is gone astray from God, and sin reigns in him unto death. All mankind are alike in this respect, all are naked, wounded, helpless, needy sinners. It is very important to see this, because it withers up all thoughts of creature ability, makes us conscious of being outside Eden's blessings, and lays us prostrate by the wayside, helpless, and sinking under the effects of the mortal wounds we have received. Our birth-condition, being a fallen one, teaches us the absolute necessity of being

born again (John 3:7),

and shows us the correctness of the Divine verdict, that

the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint (Isa. 1:5),

and that

from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores (Isa. 1:6).

How humiliating to the proud, self-sufficient lawyer, could he have traced his own portrait in this picture of the traveler by the wayside, naked, fainting, gasping, lingering in helplessness and misery, without any resources for healing or comfort, and without a friend to help or sympathize, till the Savior of sinners came where he was. Ah! man may boast of his noble faculties, and vast capabilities, as if he were unfallen; but what is he in the sight of God? How does the pure light of heavenly truth manifest him? What is he when weighed in the balance of the sanctuary? What can be more humbling than the Lord's concise description,

stripped, wounded,

and

half-dead (Luke 10:30)!

This is God's verdict, and this, I am sure, every Spirit-taught conscience acknowledges as true and righteous altogether.

2. THE INABILITY OF LAW OR ORDINANCES TO MEET MAN'S NEED. Redemption by grace was an eternal purpose in the heart of God. The Lamb was fore-ordained before the foundation of the world; and when God pronounced the promise of redemption, there was no reference to the law. It was not until 400 years after the call of Abraham that the law was given, and the reason of its being given was to make sin manifest.

The law entered that the offence might abound (Rom. 5:20).

Hence we read;

By chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side (Luke 10:31).

This legal official had no remedy for the fallen and helpless, and he could only be a witness to the fact, that there was a

wounded, half-dead

traveler there. The man needed life, peace, healing, salvation, which the priest under the law was unable to minister; he therefore

passed by on the other side.

The Levite was equally unable to meet his need; for he had no healing balm for a sin-wounded conscience. His sacrifices only brought sin to remembrance, and could not give remission; —

for it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins (Heb. 10:4).

He therefore only

looked

on the dying sinner,

passed by on the other side (Luke 10:32),
and became another witness that man was
stripped, wounded,

and under sentence of death, needing remission of sins. Thus we see something of what man's real state before God is, and what a united testimony there is to his being a fallen and helpless sinner, and the inability of rites or ceremonies to meet his need. Sad indeed would it be, if the Divine record stopped here; but, blessed be God, it does not; for our deep necessity has been God's opportunity of displaying the riches of His grace in the perfect salvation of those who could not save themselves. He loved us while we were yet sinners. And —

“Though our nature's fall in Adam
Seemed to shut us out from God,
Thus it was His counsel brought us
Nearer still, through Jesus' blood.”

3. This leads us to consider next, THE DEPTH AND SUITABILITY OF THE SAVIOR'S LOVE, so blessedly presented to us in His own ways and words; and standing in the widest contrast with the cold, heartless look of the Priest and Levite.

But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine (Luke 10:33, 34).

This is what the half-dead traveler needed. It suited such a helpless one. It exactly met his case. Nothing less would do.

Nothing more could be desired. What unutterable grace! How great, how free, how deep, the love of Christ to ruined sinners! Deep indeed, for He came down to us where we were, in our sins, guilt, and ruin. He had compassion, and brought healing and salvation. He saw the depth of our wounds, He beheld the misery and helplessness we were in, and His loving heart so flowed out with compassion, that when nothing less than the tremendous agony, suffering, and death of the cross would deliver us from wrath, He freely laid down His life for us, even when we were dead in sins. The Holy Savior was willingly made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him; and now, being raised from the dead, He lives at God's right hand, to be a Prince and a Savior, to give remission of sins. His blood has been shed for undone, guilty sinners, and His blood gives peace to the wounded conscience. His blood can heal the broken heart, and He is to us a better robe than unfallen man ever knew; even

the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all and upon all them that believe (Rom. 3:22).

This is what Jesus gives. The testimony of the God of truth to the value of Christ's death is the oil and wine that He pours into the troubled soul. When the Holy Spirit bears witness to the broken heart, of the law being fulfilled, its curse borne, sins purged, and death under the judgment of God

endured by His Son for the sinner, so that now there is full liberty for those who believe to enter into the holiest of all by the blood of Jesus, this is like oil and wine poured into the sinking soul, filling it with joy and peace. What amazing kindness! What sovereign love! How deep! How suitable! But who can speak of its power and virtue, but the wounded that have been healed by the loving Savior?

“Nothing but thy blood, O Jesus,

Could relieve us from our smart;

Nothing else from guilt release us,

Nothing else can melt the heart.

“Law and terrors do but harden,

All the while they work alone;

But a sense of blood-bought pardon

Soon dissolves a heart of stone.”

4. THE SECURITY AND PROSPECTS OF THE HEALED AND RESCUED SINNER. Christ saves to the uttermost. He not only begins a good work, but He perfects it. He not only cleanses, but brings nigh to God, and by His Spirit unites us to Himself. He met us as beggars on the dunghill, and set us among princes. He quickened us when dead in sins, and raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ. We thus become His for ever. And so we read, that after the wounded man had been bound up, and oil and wine had been poured in,

he set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee (Luke 10:34, 35).

The security of the healed man was, that the Samaritan had exalted him from the wayside to his own seat —

set him on his own beast,

and undertook to care for him, making provision for the whole time of his absence from him; and the blessed prospect before him was the hope of his coming again. We might enlarge to show the responsibility of the Church, symbolized by the inn, to care for the lambs of the Lord's flock; but we can now simply refer to it. The Samaritan's care of the restored man is brought out, not only in the statement that he

took care of him,

but also in committing him to the ministration of others, on whom he had bestowed gifts for the service, saying,

Take care of him.

The knowledge that the kind friend, who had so mercifully rescued him from death, had made arrangements for the supply of all his present and future need must have been very consoling, and calculated to deliver from all fear and distrust; while the expectation of his coming again could not fail to be an object of the deepest interest. When the shepherd found the lost sheep, and laid him on his shoulders, the security of the sheep was, that he was borne up by the strong arm of the good shepherd. The security of Noah when he entered the ark was, that

God shut him in (Gen. 7:16).

The security of the children of Israel, when the destroying angel came in judgment, was the blood of the lamb sprinkled on their lintel and door-posts. And so now the security of the believer is, that he is in Christ, justified by His blood, upheld before God by the perfect love and almighty power of the great High Priest. Most blessed is it for every true believer in the Lord Jesus to know that

by one offering he is perfected for ever (see Heb. 10:14),

and that God hath made Christ to be unto him

wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30).

In Christ he has life, righteousness, and completeness, and can never be separated from His love. Christ will care for him continually, help in difficulty, comfort in sorrow, restore when erring, and lead him into paths of righteousness, for His name's sake. Christ, who died for him, ever intercedes for him, and will come again for him. Christ dwells in him, and he dwells in Christ, and the love, wisdom, work, worth, and power of Christ are all for him.

"Once in Christ, in Christ for ever; Nothing from His love can sever."

Such is the believer's security, and the bright prospect of his soul is, that Jesus will come again, and receive him unto Himself. He knows that the same Jesus, who went into heaven, shall so come in like manner as the disciples saw Him go into heaven (Acts 1:11). He looks for the Savior, and loves His appearing. Then he knows that Christ will

see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied (Isa. 53:11);

and he says,

As for me, I will behold His face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness (see Psa. 17:15).

Time was when God's dear people were so living in the power of divine truth, that they

turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven (1 Thess. 1:9, 10).

Oh that we, who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, were so much in love with Christ, so rejoicing in His finished work, so sensibly affected by His amazing grace, as to be continually rejoicing in hope of His coming!

But perhaps my reader is a stranger to grace. You are, it may be, so far dead, as not to be sensible of your naked, wounded, perilous state. Is it so? Then let me ask you to consider how you

will bear the light and terrors of the judgment-seat, and be judged according to your works? Death steals slowly but surely over you, and will quickly hurl you far from the reach of mercy, to stand before God. But, dear fellow-sinner, you are naked, wounded, and dying, though you think little of it. Do ponder these things. God pronounces all to be guilty before Him. And is not Jesus, the Good Samaritan, able to heal you? Did He not die for the chief of sinners? Does He not delight to pardon iniquity? Does He not now come where you are with the sweet balm of His blessed gospel? Does not His precious blood cleanse from all sin? Does He refuse one sinner, however vile, that comes to Him? Then why not believe on Him to save you, that He may bind up your wounds, pour joy and peace into your soul, and make you happy in the present enjoyment of His perfect and unchanging love, with the joyful prospect of being with Him in glory for ever.

May God grant His blessing. Amen.

The Blood

“It is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul” (Lev. 17:11).

The blood of Christ is the true ground of peace. When nothing else could save, God spared not His own Son. The death of Christ both satisfies the demands of law and justice, and saves the sinner that believes. It is only in the finished work of the cross that we see salvation for the lost. When Jesus shed His blood for the remission of sins, He glorified God, and opened a fountain for sin and for uncleanness.

Without shedding of blood is no remission (Heb. 9:22).

Therefore it is written, that

it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul (Lev. 17:11).

The salvation of sinners has always been connected with blood- shedding and death. The reason is obvious. Sin’s wages is death. The law of holiness and truth is, that the soul that sinneth, it shall die. Death, then, is God’s just appointment to man, because he is a sinner. Man dies only because of sin. Death entered into the world by sin. The only way, therefore, of justly putting away sin was by death; and that no sinful man could die for the sin of another is clear, because he must die for himself. The Son of God, on whom death had no claim (because He knew no sin), was able to die for others. Nothing less than His death could save us, because we deserved death. Therefore, in matchless grace, Christ died for us — the just for the unjust.

Christ died for our sins (1 Cor. 15:3);

and as the life of the flesh is in the blood, so the shedding of blood is spoken of, in Scripture language, as the laying down of life. Hence we are told that

it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul (Lev. 17:11).

The atoning blood God only provides. His love presents it to us; and the virtue of the blood is carefully recorded in the word of God from the earliest time of sin’s entrance into the world. No sooner had Adam sinned than he had an evil conscience, and got away from God. He tried all he could to cover his nakedness, and to hide himself from the presence of his Maker. But God searched him out, and, instead of condemning him, promised a Redeemer to deliver him by having his heel bruised; and showed him that He could clothe him and his wife, though sinners, with coats, and bring them into the place of life and blessing by sacrifice. Thus God taught our first parents, and thus they learned that

it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.

Abel is next presented to us in the Scripture, as offering unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous. It was a life that he offered. He took of the firstlings of the flock. His sacrifice prefigured the blood-shedding and death of Jesus. Abel thus

acknowledged that he was a sinner before God, justly exposed to death and judgment, but that he rested only in the blood-shedding and death of the promised

Redeemer, and thus

obtained witness that he was righteous (Heb. 11:4).

In Noah's time, we also see that the blessing of God came down upon the earth because of the sweet savour of the clean beasts, which the patriarch offered in sacrifice to Jehovah. Judgment had been poured out by the windows of heaven being opened, and the fountains of the great deep being broken up; but when the clean sacrifices were offered, we are told that

the Lord smelled a sweet savour

— a savour of rest;

and the Lord said, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake, &c. (Gen. 21, 22)

Thus showing us that God can only find rest, since sin entered the world, in the atoning sacrifice of Christ, and that in this way only can He bless us. Here again we see the value of the blood.

The well-known story of the paschal lamb tells out also most strikingly, that there is safety only beneath the shelter of the blood. The sentence of judgment had gone forth upon Egypt. All the first-born were to be destroyed in one night. Neither rich nor poor, moral nor immoral, were excepted. God's word had gone forth,

All the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die (Ex. 11:5).

But was there no way of escape for any from such terrible judgments? Yes, there was a way, one way, one way only — the blood of the lamb. The children of Israel were told to take an unblemished lamb, kill it, and sprinkle the blood upon the lintel and doorposts of their houses; and God's promise to such as thus used the blood was,

When I see the blood, I will pass over you (Ex. 12:13)!

And it came to pass that every house marked with the blood was passed over by the destroying angel, and every house that was not marked with blood He entered, and executed the threatened judgment; so that

there was not a house where there was not one dead (Ex. 12:30).

The difference consisted simply in the shelter of the blood. Not in their seeing the blood, but in God's seeing it.

When I see the blood, I will pass over you.

Their safety was not in what they thought of the value of the blood, but in what God thought of it. The only question was, as to whether they, in the knowledge that judgment was coming, were under the shelter of the blood. It was not a question as to their being in a great house or small, or whether they were ignorant or learned, young or old, high or low; the only question as to safety was, whether they were trusting in the blood. Those who accepted God's remedy in the blood,

sprinkled their lintel and door-posts, and remained in their houses, under cover of that blood, until the destroying angel had passed over. Safety alone was in the blood. Thus showing us again that it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul (Lev. 17:11).

The ordinance of cleansing the leper also remarkably sets forth the value of the blood. The leprosy might be much or little, many spots or few, old standing or recent, still the leper was unclean — utterly unclean — unfit for the camp of Israel, until he was sprinkled with the blood of the sacrifice. All other washings were in vain — every other remedy was useless. He might go here or there, do this or that, cover up his spots, and hide his sores, still he was utterly unclean. But the moment he was sprinkled with the blood he was pronounced clean. It was the blood that made the difference. It was the blood that cleansed the unclean. We are told,

Then shall the priest sprinkle upon him that is to be cleansed from his leprosy seven times, and shall pronounce him clean (see Lev. 14:7).

How blessed this is! How clearly it illustrates that
it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.

Let me only add on this point, that directly the leper was pronounced clean, the living bird, having been identified with the dead bird by being dipped in its blood, was

let loose into the open field (see Lev. 14:7);

so the resurrection of Christ from the dead is God's public proof that Christ had by Himself purged our sins with His own blood.

We find the Holy Ghost again putting honor upon the blood, and showing its vital importance in the beautiful action of the high priest entering into the holy place (Lev. 16). The apostle Paul, commenting on this, tells us in Heb. 9, that into the holiest of all

went the high priest alone, once every year, not without blood (Heb. 9:7).

And why not without blood? Because nothing else shelters sinful man from the wrath of God but the blood; for nothing else remits sin. It would have been death to Aaron to enter into the holiest of all without blood. Moses was thus commanded:

Speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times. . . within the vail before the mercy seat, . . . that he die not; for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy-seat. Thus shall Aaron come into the holy place, with a bullock for a sin-offering, and a ram for a burnt-offering . . . and he shall take of the blood of the bullock, and shall sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercy-seat eastward; and before the mercy-seat shall he sprinkle of the blood with his finger seven times (Lev. 16:2, 3, 14).

Thus we see another witness to the value of the blood, as being the way of access into God's presence, and showing us again that

it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.

And I ask the reader to mark these various testimonies of Scripture to the efficacy of the blood, and to consider whether the evidence is not conclusive, that those only are on the true ground of peace and blessing whose confidence is in the blood — the precious blood of Christ. Nothing less than the blood could shelter Israel, cleanse the leper, or enable the high priest to stand in God's presence; neither can anything but the blood of Christ cleanse the conscience, give peace in God's presence, or shelter any from the wrath to come.

By the light of New Testament Scriptures, under the Spirit's teaching, we are able to see that all the various sacrifices for sin, &c., under the law, pointed to the one offering of Christ; consequently, since the death of Christ, the sacrifices of bulls and of goats have ceased to be offered. They served a good purpose in shadowing forth the one all-efficacious sacrifice that was coming, and in showing the power of His blood, not only to give us eternal safety, but to answer every question of conscience, as well as every requirement of God's holiness. Therefore the apostle Paul tells us, that in those many sacrifices under the law there was remembrance of sins, but no remission; they could not purge the conscience, because they could not take away sin; but that Christ, by His one offering, which He once offered, put away sin; therefore the blood of Christ purges the conscience to serve the living God. The apostle Peter also says,

Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot (1 Pet. 1:18, 19).

Hence, when we read that

it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul (Lev. 17:11),

we are to understand that reference is made to the blood of Jesus.

It is blessed to notice, in the words immediately preceding the text we are considering, the grace of God as the provider of this atoning blood.

The life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar, to make an atonement (reconciliation) for your souls (Lev. 17:11).

This at once opens up to us the blessed truth, that God Himself is the source of our redemption; that He gave His Son — sent forth His Son — sent His Son to be the Savior of the world; so that our faith and hope might be in God, and that we might find access with confidence in His presence. And surely it is in the cross that God sets forth the atoning blood. There He shows that He loves us. There it was, by the death of His Son, that God reconciled us unto Himself. Surely it is the blood, the blood of Christ, that makes atonement for our souls. And in comparing our text with New Testament Scriptures, we shall see that we have remission of sins by the blood, justification by the blood, peace by the blood, nearness to God in Christ and by His blood, that we worship on the ground of the blood, and shall enter into glory because of the value of blood. May the Lord help us to consider each of these points a little!

1. REMISSION OF SINS BY THE BLOOD. The Divine testimony, that without shedding of blood is no remission (Heb. 9:22),

is enough to show the utter impossibility of obtaining forgiveness of sins but through the blood. God cleanses us on the ground of sin having been judged and put away. This Christ has done. He declares that His blood was shed for many for the remission of sins. Had He stopped a hair's-breadth short of death, we could not have had forgiveness. But He bare our sins in His own body on the tree; thus justice was satisfied, and sins were purged. Hence all those who are trusting in the blood of Christ are forgiven. In Him we have redemption through His blood — the forgiveness of sins. The blood, then, is that which gives remission of sins. All the priests and cardinals in the world may pronounce pardon, but

without shedding of blood is no remission.

Some persons say, "I think my sins are forgiven, because I feel so different"; or, "I think they will be forgiven, if I live differently"; but it is all wrong; such people are deceived, because they are not trusting in the blood; for

it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul (Lev. 17:11).

"Joyful truth! He bore transgression

In His body on the cross!

Through His blood there's full remission

For the vilest, e'en for us. J

esus for the sinner bleeds;

Nothing more the sinner needs."

2. JUSTIFICATION BY THE BLOOD. Men may try to justify themselves before their fellow-men, and sometimes succeed in doing so; but we cannot justify ourselves before God. He knows that we are all guilty and unrighteous, and we cannot truthfully take any other ground. But the Scriptures teach us that those only who believe in the Lord Jesus are justified, and that they are justified from all things by Him. In the blood, God declares that He is just, and the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. God justifies us through the blood; for the blood of Jesus not only tells us of sin put away, but also of One who was perfectly obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; so that, by the obedience of One, many are made righteous. Therefore we are also told, that

being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him (Rom. 5:9).

We have, then, present justification, not by our own devotedness, or good intentions, but by the blood; so that all who believe in Christ are justified, now justified, by the blood of Jesus. How clear it is, then, that

it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul!

3. PEACE BY THE BLOOD. Every one who has peace with God knows that it is only through the precious blood of Christ. Nothing quenches the burning of a guilty conscience but the blood. It was nothing less than the death of Christ that satisfied God's justice; therefore that only pacifies the conscience. This is why the Holy Ghost so often uses those texts which refer to the blood of Christ

to give peace to anxious souls. It is an already accomplished peace. He hath made peace by the blood of His cross, and God is now preaching peace by Jesus Christ; not peace by ordinances, duties, and the like, but peace by Jesus Christ; and all who simply look to Christ, and know that they are justified by His blood, have peace with God; not shall have, but

have peace with God (Rom. 5:1).

How is it that many anxious souls have not peace? Because they do not believe what God says about the value of the sacrifice of Christ. They look to themselves, to see if their experience is good enough, bad enough, or religious enough; so that, as frames and feelings change, they alter their judgment of safety. The end of looking to experience for peace must be disappointing; but when, driven out of self and its wretchedness, they look simply to the Lord Jesus, who shed His blood to save sinners, they find peace.

Others are greatly distressed with the fear of death. They do not see that Christ has died in their stead, that He was brought into the dust of death, and tasted death, with all its terrors and judgments, for them; and forget that Jesus said,

If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death (John 8:51).

It is true, we may fall asleep in Jesus, but it is a stingless death; and death is so far behind us, and we have been so judicially delivered from it by our Substitute on the cross, that we shall not all sleep; for when Christ descends from heaven, redemption-work will be applied to the bodies of those who are alive, and in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, we shall be eternally in the presence and likeness of Jesus.

The full peace of others is hindered by the thought of coming judgment. They think that Christ must have us before Him as the Judge, before we can be sure of being saved. This is not true. Christ has been judged for us; our sins have been already condemned in Him, removed from us, borne, suffered for, and put away by Him on the cross: so that, instead of our sins being judged again, God declares,

Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more (Heb. 10:17);

that they are cast behind His back, &c. Therefore it is clear that Christ hath borne death and judgment for us according as it is written,

AS it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: SO Christ was once offered (Heb. 9:27, 28).

Thus we see that, death and judgment having been settled for us by Christ, we are called to rejoice in hope of glory; not to be looking for Christ as the Judge, but as our Bridegroom. Not to be expecting to be tried at a general assize, but to be looking for God's Son from heaven, when we shall be caught up to meet Him in the air. Saved ones giving an account of their stewardship at the tribunal of Christ is another thing; but that will not take place until we have glorified bodies, and are like Christ, and with Him for ever.

Again, there are some who have not peace, because they look to the work of the Spirit in them for peace, instead of the work of Christ for them. They see clearly and rightly that it is only by the

regenerating power of the Holy Ghost that any one can enter into the kingdom of God, and they look into themselves for the movings and actings of the Spirit for peace instead of the blood. They do not know that the Spirit's office is not to testify of Himself, but of Christ; that He shows us the beauty and glory of Christ, and the blessedness and suitability of His finished work. The Holy Ghost does not say that He has made peace, but that Christ has made peace. He points us to Christ and His blood for forgiveness, peace, righteousness, justification, and redemption. The Spirit comforts us by ministering Christ and His truth to our souls. Therefore we know we are born again, and have the Spirit, because we find peace with God through Christ's blood. The Spirit writes God's law (or truth) in our minds and in our hearts; so that we not only remember it, but feel it, and have our affections kindled by it, because He testifies to us of God's love. Christ is our peace, not the Spirit, because

it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul (Lev. 17:11).

But I must pass on, and can only briefly notice the three remaining points.

4. WE HAVE NEARNESS TO GOD BY THE BLOOD. Our sins separated us from God. Naturally we were far from God, but now in Christ, and through His blood, we are made nigh — brought to the Father's bosom. Thus the believer stands forgiven and blest in God's holy presence; thus he is sanctified by the blood of Christ, reconciled unto God, and stands in happy confidence and grace before Him in love.

5. WE WORSHIP ON THE GROUND OF THE BLOOD. We enter into the holiest

by the blood of Jesus (Heb. 10:19),

and worship the Father. In ourselves there is no ground of praise and thanksgiving, but everything to make us abhor ourselves, and repent in dust and ashes; but the blood so fully witnesses to us of the Father's love, and of our eternal redemption and peace, that we praise and magnify the unsearchable riches of Divine grace. Our consciences are purged, our hearts gladdened, our minds in peace, our souls lifted up; so that we are ready to say,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 1:3).

"The Savior's precious blood

Has made our title sure;

He pass'd through death's dark raging flood

To make our rest secure."

6. WE SHALL ENTER GLORY BECAUSE OF THE BLOOD. We are purchased by the blood of Jesus. Our hope of glory is Christ, not self. Had not the corn of wheat fallen into the ground and died, it would have been alone; but having died, it brings forth much fruit. All believers are the fruit of Christ's death, are washed in His blood, and will be around the throne of God in heaven, as brought there solely on the ground of the blood of the Lamb. Then we shall sing more sweetly (but not more truly than we can now),

Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen (Rev. 1:5, 6).

Then it will be fully known that

it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul (Lev. 17:11).

Christ the Door

I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved (John 10:9).

The occasion on which our blessed Lord brought out this wonderful truth was that of opening the eyes of one who had been born blind, as recorded in the preceding chapter, where we find he was cast out of the synagogue because of his confession of Christ. This was a great offence, and still nothing is more offensive to proud man than a true and hearty confession of the Lord Jesus. The apostle's word is not less true now than it was then, that

all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12).

The Lord had met the man who had been cast out, and blessedly revealed Himself to him. Then the Lord turned the conversation to that of spiritual blindness, so that some of the Pharisees, deeply roused by what they had heard, asked Him,

Are we blind also? (John 9:40)

For Jesus had said,

For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind (John 9:39).

A very important testimony; for if a man takes the place of being blind, God is able to make him see; but if he says, I see, and have always been able to discern the things of God, he will have to learn, sooner or later, that he is and always has been blind.

The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God

. . . neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Cor. 2:14).

This searching testimony of our Lord, as I have observed, so sorely touched the Pharisees, that they said,

Are we blind also?

They felt, doubtless, that they had all the learning of the day, and were the most intelligent people as to Scripture knowledge. Is it possible, then, that such as they could be blind? What was our Lord's reply?

Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth (John 9:41).

That is, if they had really known their dark condition, and taken the place of being spiritually blind before God, they would have known God's grace and power to forgive their sins; but saying

We see

implied self-complacency, and the absence of felt need; and it is the sick who need the physician. There must be a sense of blindness for any to desire their eyes to be opened; a sense of guilt to lead any one to desire forgiveness.

Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God (John 3:3).

The Lord is still speaking to the Pharisees in the tenth chapter. They not only professed to see, but to guide and shepherd God's sheep. The question is, How came they thus in the place of shepherds? Had they a Divine or human qualification? Had they gone in by the door? for if they had climbed up some other way, they were only thieves and robbers. A very solemn, searching announcement. The true Shepherd enters by the door; the porter opens to Him; the sheep hear His voice; they are His own sheep, and He leadeth them out. Yes, He leads them out from former ways and associations; outside everything that dishonors God — outside the path of sight, because into the path of faith and love.

The blessed Lord, the true and good Shepherd, declares that He is the door, the only way of access to God, the ONLY door, for any who desire salvation. He said,

I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved (John 10:9).

Thus we see that Jesus not only sought to convict these Pharisees of their blindness and falseness, but throws wide open the door to any who had a desire to enter in. There was not a soul who heard Christ's ministry that could go away and say, "There is no salvation for me"; for Jesus said,

By me if any man

— no matter who he is —

if any man enter in, he shall be saved.

How simple this is! A door is not a long, dreary passage. A person only takes a single step to enter a door. My unconverted readers, you are outside the door. It is simply entering into God's presence through Jesus Christ His Son, who was crucified for sinners, but is now at God's right hand, and you are saved, and saved for ever. It is

by ME,

said Jesus, not by feelings, nor by experiences, nor by good resolutions, nor even by good works, but by Christ.

By ME if any man enter in, he shall be saved.

Oh the blessedness of having the Lord's authority for the assertion, that those of us who have entered into God's presence by Christ are saved! Can anything be more simple? I remember hearing of a poor sick woman, who was told by some ladies who visited her, that Jesus was the door into God's presence, and that there was no other way, and that all who entered in by Him were saved. She replied, "May I enter in in that way?" She was told, "Yes." "Then why not now?" said she; and, turning on her side, she simply looked up toward heaven, and taking God at His word, entered in by Jesus, and was filled with joy and peace.

Mark again, I say, the simplicity and the preciousness of the words,

By me if any man enter in, he shall be saved (John 10:9).

It is no use saying you are too great a sinner, too old, too young, or anything else; it is,

if any man.

God is no respecter of persons. All have sinned. Every man is guilty before God. He that believeth not is condemned already. Now it is true that, if any man enter in by Christ, he will be saved; but in a little while it will be said,

If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed when the Lord cometh (see 1 Cor. 16:22, Anathema Maranatha = Accursed — the Lord cometh, JND note).

Now,

WHOSOEVER believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16);

but by and by, WHOSOEVER is not found written in the Book of Life will be cast into the lake of fire.

Have you known, dear reader, what it is to receive this great salvation? Have you entered in by the door? Do you know what it is to find yourself in God's presence, through the death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ? A believer is one who has accepted Christ for his Savior, who has entered in through the door. A person may know that Christ is the door, and yet have never entered in. This is the difference between knowledge and faith. Faith takes Christ simply at His word, and enters in.

By me if any man enter in, he shall be saved (John 10:9).

This is the testimony of Jesus. Is there any room for doubt or fear, when you know that you have entered in by Christ? Surely He delights to save. He casts out none that come to Him. Resting on His word, we have perfect peace; we find ourselves at rest in God's presence.

The posture that Jesus now takes toward a guilty world is that of Savior, but in a little while it will be that of Judge. How, then, can any escape who neglect this great salvation? He will judge both the living and the dead; but now He is calling, in richest love and mercy, to sinners to enter in and be saved. His arms are still thrown wide open. His almighty power is still snatching brands from the burning. He yet calls in tenderest love,

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Matt. 11:28).

All He asks of you is to

Come.

He wants nothing more of you than to submit to be wholly saved by Him; to

enter in

on the ground of an already accomplished redemption; to

refuse not Him that speaketh (Heb. 12:25),

but to rest in His finished work. Can you, will you, any longer, then, be taken up with the unsatisfying pleasures of sin; and by your own hand of unbelief close this only door of escape from the wrath to come?

Thank God, the door is still wide open, and Christ saves to the uttermost all them that come unto God by Him; but soon the door will be shut. Many will knock then, but the door is closed upon them for ever. Many will be in earnest about their eternal welfare then, but it will be too late. In their anxiety for a mess of pottage, they counted eternal blessings unworthy of their interest; but now they feel themselves close on the precipice of outer darkness and despair, their distress is awakened, and never to be relieved; they knock, and call, and shriek,

Lord, Lord, open unto us.

But the reply from within,

I know you not (Luke 13:25),

will for ever plunge them into the despondency of an eternal gloom. Oh, once more, think of those sweet words of Jesus,

I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved (John 10:9)!

Strive

Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the Master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are: depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out (Luke 13:23-28).

Some persons seem constantly occupied with religious questions. Their enquiry is not, "Am I saved?" but, "Are others saved?" Sometimes we find a fond parent solicitous about the future state of a dying child, a kind master anxious about his afflicted servant's spiritual condition, and others manifesting concern for the ignorant and poor around them, without laying to heart what their own state before God really is. It was so in the days of our Lord.

One said unto Him, Lord, are there few that be saved? (Luke 13:23)

to which Jesus replied,

Strive to enter in at the strait gate (Luke 13:24).

Thus He sought to lead him away from the consideration of others, to ponder the all-important question of his own soul's salvation; and exposed the folly of appearing concerned for others, while he himself was in the broad road to destruction. So weighty, so essential, is the point, and so fatal would a mistake be, that He commands them to

strive (or agonize) to enter in at the strait gate.

We do well to observe, that the instruction here is not that they were to do a great many things, or even one thing, to make themselves fit for God; or that they were to wander through a long, tedious labyrinth to find blessing and safety. No; it is simply a

gate

that is presented to them as the alone way of escape; and their security and blessing depended on their entering in at the gate. The condition of all outside is most perilous; but there is a way of escape; and judgment and condemnation must overtake those who do not accept the only way of deliverance by entering in at the strait gate.

1. WHAT IS THE STRAIT GATE? There could have been no way of escape for sinners from the wrath to come, had not Jesus died upon the cross.

Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit (John 12:24).

It is the cross of Christ that speaks to us of sin put away, redemption accomplished, and of the sinner's only way to God. Christ crucified, then, is the

strait gate.

Jesus lifted up on the cross is the door of access.

I am the door,

said He:

by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved (John 10:9).

The cross of Christ, therefore, becomes the point of separation between the saved and lost. Not to enter into God's presence through this gate is still to tarry in the place of death and judgment; but to enter into the Father's presence through the atoning work of His dear Son is present peace and eternal salvation. The gospel thus presents to us a door of escape, and it is still wide open; it welcomes all guilty sinners that

enter in

by faith, thus sheltering them for ever from the wrath of God, and shutting them into the peace-speaking presence of the Father of mercies, and God of all comfort.

2. IT IS A STRAIT GATE. True Christianity is an individual thing. The gate is so strait, so narrow, that all who enter go in one by one. Many long to take others with them, but each person is accountable to God for himself; every one must be exercised before God on account of his own sin. The gospel appeals to the individual conscience.

He that believeth on the Son (John 3:36),

He that hath the Son (1 John 5:12),

He that believeth and is baptized, &c. (Mark 16:16).

Paul said,

I know whom I have believed (2 Tim. 1:12),

I obtained mercy (1 Tim. 1:13, 16),

Christ

loved me (Gal. 2:20).

This is very weighty, and shows us the deep necessity of each one asking the all-important question, "Am I saved?" We may be members of religious bodies, and outwardly appear consistent; but those only who have entered in at the strait gate are saved.

3. ENTER IN. There is no promise of safety to any who do not

enter in (Luke 13:24)

at the strait gate. We are not to think about the gate merely, but to enter in.

It is one thing to know there is a Savior, and another to find salvation through His blood. It is to be feared that many who say they know the way of salvation have not availed themselves of it. We enter in at the strait gate by faith. In the death and resurrection of Christ, we see that the God of grace has opened a door of salvation for sinners, and by faith in the efficacy of that redemption-work we enter into God's presence, and know Him as a sin-pardoning God. It is not my knowing the fact that Christ is a Savior that saves me, but believing on Him for the salvation of my soul; and thus I enter into the presence of the God of peace by Him. In Israel's time, it was the manslayer who had entered into the city of refuge that was safe. In the days of Noah, those only who actually entered into the ark were saved. Many might be just outside, trying to lay hold on the boards, with the water gurgling in their throats; but they were as unsaved as those who were the farthest from it. And so in the case of the crowd that surrounded our Lord: it was only the one who came and touched the hem of His garment that was made whole. There must, then, be the receiving of Christ, trusting in Him, believing in Him, taking refuge in Him, resting on His finished work, entering in by Him for life and salvation.

4. STRIVE TO ENTER IN. This solemn subject calls for earnestness. The eternal importance of the work of Christ demands it. God cannot bear indifference. Embracing views merely is a poor thing. Learning a few religious ways and phrases will not do for God. All the world are guilty before Him. Judgment is quickly coming. The wrath of God is soon coming, and fall it must upon all Christless souls. His almighty arm and perfect love have made a door of escape, and His gracious voice exclaims to sinners,

Strive, or agonize, to enter in at the strait gate!

Do not be content at having serious impressions, or good desires. Rest not till you have entered in at the strait gate. Be in real earnest. Let not formal duties suffice; let not a little concern satisfy you; let not the credit of being religious among men be enough for you. Oh, no! Have real concern, for eternity is at hand. Your life is short; many will miss the strait gate; many will be deceived; many will find out their mistake when it is too late. Strive, then, agonize to enter in at the strait gate; escape for thy life, flee from the pit, turn to the Savior; on no account miss His great salvation.

5. THERE ARE MANY HINDRANCES TO PERSONS ENTERING IN AT THE STRAIT GATE.

(I). The carnal mind. We all naturally like to live and act as if there were no God, and as if we were not needing salvation. We all strive to be happy apart from God and the Savior. We are of the world which lieth in the wicked one. We constantly stray farther from God, doing, as far as possible, our own will, and having our own way. The mind is carnally opposed to God, and not subject to Him; it seeks rest any where rather than in God.

All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way (Isa. 53:6).

The heart, therefore, is naturally opposed to striving to enter in at the strait gate.

(2). Satan is a great hinderer — he specially tries to keep persons from taking refuge in Christ for salvation. He blinds the eye, lest the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. Formerly he tried to suppress the mention of the name of Jesus altogether. Now he can no longer effect this; but he diligently seeks to hinder the testimony to the value of His death. He has not so much objection to people thinking of the strait gate; but he still opposes with all his might their entering in. He knows that persons may be acquainted with the history of Christ's ways and miracles, and still be unsaved; but it is coming, through Christ crucified, to God for salvation, — to the risen and ascended Savior for righteousness and glory, that he so opposes.

(3). The world also says, Do not enter in at the strait gate. It promises its gains and emoluments, its favours and advancements, its luxuries and gratifications; it presents a glare of tinsel to try to satisfy the human heart, and blind the eye. Its changing fashions, moving scenes, and untiring promises of improvement, occupy the mind; and so it seeks to lull the awakened conscience to find repose in its adulterous bosom. All these elements tend to keep the soul from entering in at the strait gate, and to linger still in the place of condemnation and judgment, where the Lord is coming to put all enemies under His feet.

(4). Relations and acquaintances are sometimes mighty enemies in trying to keep souls, if possible, from entering in at the strait gate. Loss of worldly position or business, the expected scorning of friends, and many other such things, are presented as powerful reasons for disobeying Him who said,

Strive to enter in at the strait gate;

while the certain knowledge of present salvation is talked of as presumption, and present forgiveness of sins through the blood of Christ put down for enthusiasm. Thus there are terrible obstacles, both within and around, to persons coming to Christ crucified and risen for salvation.

(5). THE EXPERIENCE OF THOSE WHO "STRIVE." They agonize, or strive to enter in at the strait gate, because they know they are sinners, justly deserving God's eternal condemnation; they are assured that there is no other way of escape, and that

"No works or duties of their own

Can for the smallest sin atone."

They are conscious there is a principle of pride in them naturally, to induce them to put confidence in themselves instead of the atoning work of Christ; therefore, under the guidance and power of the Spirit of God, they inwardly strive against such thoughts. They feel that their proud, carnal minds try to hinder, but they

strive.

They hear the alluring cries of the great deceiver, but they

strive.

They behold the world's glare, but they

strive

to enter in at the strait gate. They agonize to rest simply on the finished work of Christ, and know there is no other entrance for the sinner into God's happy presence but through the finished work of Jesus. They are not satisfied at merely reading the Scriptures, or knowing a little about Christ, or at being considered religious by others, or at stately hearing gospel truths proclaimed. No. They feel that they need salvation, and nothing less than salvation can satisfy them, nothing short of peace with God, against whom they are conscious of having so sinned, will do for them. They know the gate is still open, and they do not know how soon it may be shut. They are conscious that they must perish for ever, if they do not enter in. They perceive that God has opened the gate; that the Savior says,

Enter in (Luke 13:24);

that the Scriptures declare it is the only way; that God's servants urgently proclaim its eternal importance, and thousands around declare they have experienced the blessedness of it; therefore they

enter in at the strait gate.

They come as guilty, worthless, naked sinners, and they find in Calvary's cross that God Himself is the source of pardon, peace, righteousness, and glory, for all that come unto Him through Christ.

Knowing that Christless souls must enter into the pit of eternal destruction, they could not rest till they fled for refuge to the hope set before them in the gospel, and knew that they were saved. By faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, they experience that they have exchanged a guilty for a purged conscience — have been rescued from an evil world for the presence of the God of grace and peace; they feel themselves new creatures; they know that they have passed from death unto life, and they rejoice in pardoning love.

"Pardon from an offended God,

Pardon for crimes of deepest dye,

Pardon bestowed through Jesu's blood,

Pardon that brings the rebel nigh;

Who is a pardoning God like Thee?

Or where the grace so rich and free?"

But our Lord gave four reasons why they should strive to enter in at the strait gate.

1. Many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.

2. The door will be shut.

3. Many professors will be shut out.

4. The eternal torment of the lost.

1. Many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. The time will come when it will be too late. Some will knock, and get no admittance. Now the Savior's language is,

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Matt. 11:28);

and,

Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely (Rev. 22:17).

But the time is coming when God must deal with men righteously, instead of in grace, as He now does; for God

hath appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17:31).

Now, God is preaching to guilty sinners

peace by Jesus Christ (Acts 10:36),

then He will judge men according to their works. Now, many will not enter in at the strait gate; then, many will knock, saying,

Lord, Lord, open unto us (Luke 13:25)!

Now, sinners hide in the Savior's arms, and are saved; then, sinners will seek salvation, and will not find it. Now, they will not come to God to cover their sins with the Redeemer's blood; but by and by they will cry to the rocks and mountains, saying,

Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb (Rev. 6:16).

Those who do not know the Savior now will find that He will ere long say,

I know you not (Luke 13:25).

How important, then, that persons should at once

enter in at the strait gate!

2. The door will be shut.

When once the Master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door (Luke 13:25).

The gospel is not always going to be preached. God will not always send forth the message of peace. He is the God of judgment as well as the God of peace, and Christ is a Judge as well as a Savior. He is now seated on the right hand of God, but He will ere long rise up and shut to the door. The preaching of the cross will then cease; the seeker will not find, the knocker will be disappointed, the asker will be refused; the gospel testimony will close, the church be removed to glory, and the hypocrite and unbeliever left for judgment. Men will discover their mistake then. The folly of putting off salvation will be made manifest. The door will be shut, and man's doom eternally settled.

He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still (Rev. 22:11).

How imperative, then, is the necessity to

strive to enter in at the strait gate.

3. Many professors will be shut out. In the parable of the ten virgins we are told that, after the door is shut, many will come knocking, saying,

Lord, Lord, open to us (Matt. 25:11);

and here, also, our Lord says,

Many

will say,

We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets; but He shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity (Luke 13:26, 27).

On another occasion our Lord speaks of these persons as saying in that day,

Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you (Matt. 7:22, 23)!

These things clearly show us that many who have professed to be servants of Christ, and who may have accomplished great things in His name, never knew the value of His sin-atoning work for their own souls, never entered into the strait gate for their own salvation. How very awful this is! They may have striven to accomplish wonderful works in His name, but never knew what it was to strive to enter in at the strait gate.

What a solemn warning this presents to any who have not yet trusted in the atoning work of Christ for the salvation of their souls!

4. The eternal torment of the lost.

He that believeth not shall be damned (Mark 16:16),

and

He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him (John 3:36),

are words of the God of truth which must have their fulfilment. Not to

enter in at the strait gate

for salvation, is not to believe in that Savior whom God hath sent, but to be a

worker of iniquity (see Luke 13:27),

living in rebellion against the God of love and peace.

There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Luke 13:28).

They will have the consciousness that others are saved, but themselves for ever lost; they will know that others are for ever happy through the redemption-work of Christ, and they themselves cast into the lake of fire, into everlasting punishment; where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. How powerful were the Savior's appeals! How simple, yet how thrilling, were the reasons He assigned why persons should

strive to enter in at the strait gate!

Many will hear these things, and yet not seek the way of escape. Some will not submit to the righteousness of God, but go about to establish their own righteousness; their thoughts rise not higher than their own fancied goodness. Others openly reject the joyful sound of salvation through the death of Christ; they scorn the truth of the Lord's return from heaven, and scoffingly exclaim —

Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation (2 Pet. 3:4).

Others hear the truth, will distinguish between the doctrines of grace and many of the religious dogmas of the day, and show some respect for ordinances and outward sanctity; but their hearts have never yielded to be saved wholly by the finished work of Christ. Their inward thought is,

We will not have this man to reign over us (Luke 19:14);

while the Scripture too plainly draws the awful picture of others professing to go out with lamps to meet the bridegroom while being destitute of oil in their lamps; or of attempting to be guests of the marriage supper without having on a wedding garment. In short, while the Scripture plainly shows us that salvation is only to those who

enter in at the strait gate,

we find many warnings presented therein of man risking his soul's eternal welfare on almost every conceivable pretense; thus, while God says there is no other way, and no other name, whereby man can be saved, but the name of Jesus, man in self-confidence assumes that there are other names and other ways.

Happy those who do not presume to argue and contend with the Almighty, but feel that God is greater than man, and the only fountain of light, and love, and truth. The first sign often manifest of spiritual life is the willingness to lay aside human thoughts, and be ready to submit to God's thoughts; for naturally our thoughts are not as His thoughts, neither are our ways His ways. It is well when a soul is made willing to receive God's truth. Such turn to the Scriptures to know the mind and will of God. From the Bible they learn, under the Spirit's teaching, that fallen man is a corrupt tree that cannot bring forth good fruit; that without union with Christ risen and glorified, there can be no fruit brought forth to God. They are instructed also by the Spirit, through the word of the Lord, that the world is under sentence of condemnation, and that the only way of salvation from the wrath to come is by faith in the Son of God. Thus the awakened soul, that begins to submit to God's thoughts, is led to submit also to God's righteousness and redemption in Christ, and to rejoice in being justified by faith, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Oh, my reader! hast thou entered in at the strait gate? Have the iron sinews of thy knees yet bowed in adoring gratitude to the Savior of sinners? Has thy hard, stony heart been broken by the truth of God, and melted by the Savior's love? Have the tears and groans, the agony and bloody sweat, the suffering and death of the Son of God, been matters of the deepest concern to thee? If not before, may the language of thy soul now be, —

"Nothing in my hands I bring,

Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
Vile I to the fountain fly,
Wash me, Savior, or I die.”

Make Haste

Make haste, and come down; for to-day I must abide at thy house (Luke 19:5).

The speaker here is the Lord Jesus. The person addressed is a sinner among the publicans. The subject is of vital importance. The words are few, but earnest and decided. The Lord knew the value of one soul, and the profitless character of everything else in comparison with it. He could fully enter into the frailty of human life, the countless ages of eternity, the ceaseless torments of the lost, and the everlasting joy and glory of the saved. He felt the eternal importance of the soul's salvation; hence His ministry was most urgent. At one time He would say,

Fear Him which is able to destroy both body and soul in hell (Matt. 10:28);

on another occasion,

Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish (Luke 13:3, 5);

and here it was,

Make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house (Luke 19:5).

Zacchæus was a tax-gatherer, or publican, a chief man among them too, and seemed to have made money by his profession, for he was rich. Publicans were not considered honest persons, and therefore were not much respected; and Zacchæus's allusion to taking things by false accusation seems to imply that he had not been blameless in this respect. He had, however, heard of Jesus, His mighty miracles, and wonderful works and words, and had a great desire to see Him. But the crowd around the Lord was great, which operated as a hindrance to his seeing Jesus, unless he ran before, outstripped the multitude, and got upon some elevated place. Though a rich man, his purpose was so decided, that he would not allow anything to hinder his seeing Jesus; he therefore ran before, and climbed up a sycamore tree, in the direction he knew that the Lord would pass. There might have been more than mere curiosity working in his heart; for he neither allowed the press of the crowd, nor anything else, to hinder his desire being gratified; we see, also, that he was enabled to obey the Lord immediately that he was

called (see Luke 19:5).

But, be that as it may, it is clear that Jesus was the great object of attraction to him —

he sought to see Jesus (Luke 19:3).

Nothing less than Christ Himself would satisfy him; so he went where he knew that the Lord would pass. But he little thought, while he was occupied in seeking the Lord, that the Lord was seeking him. Many a seeker says, "I am trying to find the Savior"; but the truth is, that He who came to seek and save the lost is seeking them. They would not have desires after Christ, longings for an interest in His salvation, and heartfelt cries after Him, if He had not commenced a work of grace in their souls. When the women were seeking the Lord after His resurrection, the bright angel said to

them,

Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified (Matt. 28:5).

Oh! my reader, if Christ Jesus who was crucified for sinners is the One you are really seeking, be encouraged, and fear not! In meditating on the Scripture before us, we may notice,

1. The gracious posture of the Son of God.
2. His urgent appeal.
3. The blessedness of receiving Jesus, and its results.

1. THE POSTURE OF THE SON OF GOD. We are told that

When Jesus came to the place, He looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchæus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house (Luke 19:5).

What amazing condescension, for the Lord of glory thus to look up and speak to sinful man! What love! But such is the character of the heart of Jesus. Though bright angelic hosts surround the throne of heaven, we are told that

His delights were with the sons of men (see Prov. 8:31).

Yes, man, who was created in the image of God, always had a place in His heart; and when fallen into degradation and ruin, through sin and rebellion against his Creator, Jesus still loved man; and his fallen, undone state only served the more to make manifest the vast resources of Divine love and mercy. The Son of God, who is in the bosom of the Father, left the bright glory and happiness of the throne of heaven, condescended to be made of a woman, and came forth

in the likeness of sinful flesh (Rom. 8:3),

that as Man, by the death of the cross, He might redeem man from all iniquity, and bring many sons to glory. This is Divine love. Though He was God manifest in the flesh, He emptied Himself, and took upon Him the form of a servant. He did all Jehovah's righteous will, obeyed every jot and tittle of the law, and humbled Himself unto death, even the death of the cross, that by such depths of humiliation, pain, and death under the judgment of God as Sin-bearer, He might glorify the Father, and redeem us from the utter destruction and eternal despair to which, as sinners, we were justly exposed. It was the same loving-hearted Jesus, who afterward died on the cross, that came where Zacchæus was, and said,

make haste, and come down; for to-day I must abide at thy house (Luke 19:5).

It was the same Jesus who said to sinful Israel by His prophet in days of old,

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool (Isa. 1:18).

It was the same blessed Savior who said to His apostles after His resurrection,

Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned (Mark 16:15, 16).

It was the same Jesus who said,

If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink (John 7:37);

and who still says,

Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely (Rev. 22:17).

Such is the love of Christ, and such is the gracious posture He still takes towards sinful man. He delighteth in mercy. He waiteth to be gracious. He saves to the uttermost. He welcomes every sinner that comes to Him for salvation. He calls loudly by His gospel, His servants, and His providence —

Make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house (Luke 19:5).

Still, with long-suffering kindness, He proclaims salvation for the lost, saying,

I will have mercy, and not sacrifice (Matt. 19:13; 12:7).

In wondrous grace He died for man's redemption, and in the same boundless love He says,

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Matt. 11:28).

“Love, only love, Thy heart inclined,

And brought Thee, Savior of mankind,

Down from Thy throne above;

Love made Thee here a man of grief,

To bleed and die for my relief;

O mystery of love!”

2. LET US NOW CONSIDER THE LORD'S URGENT APPEAL.

Make haste, and come down (Luke 19:5).

We are all naturally lifted up with self-esteem. Men live and speak as if they were not fallen creatures; but all true Christians have experienced what it is to

come down

to receive salvation. All must

come down

if they would be saved from the wrath to come; for all have sinned, and the blood of Christ alone gives remission. The gospel is preached that men may

come down

to the Savior; for He calls the high-minded to

come down

and receive forgiveness of sins. Oh that proud men would
come down
and receive Christ!

The Lord killeth, and the Lord maketh alive: . . . He bringeth low, and He lifteth up (1 Sam. 2:6, 7).

The Holy Ghost convinces of sin before He gives peace to the soul through Christ. The way of God the Father is, to bring the lofty mind of man down to the Savior's feet; for Jesus said,

Every man therefore that hath heard and hath learned of the Father cometh unto me (John 6:45).

Some persons are especially Pharisaic in their views. They seem inflated with self-righteous notions. They think themselves better than their neighbors. They boast of a well-spent life, and highly prize their good intentions. They flatter themselves in their own eyes, and when conscience accuses, they at once take refuge in their outward sanctity, creature-merit, religious ordinances, alms- deeds, &c., as a compensation. With self-complacent feelings they look down upon the passing crowd, and resolve to pursue their lofty course with increased zeal. Such, however, must come down,

if they would know God's salvation. Self-righteousness must be brought low, creature-merit must be disowned, and high thoughts must be laid aside; they must

come down

as lost, undone, unclean sinners to the Savior's outstretched arms, if they would know His great salvation; for He came not to call the righteous, but to bring sinners to repentance.

There are also persons who, in pride of heart, cry out, like Pharaoh,

Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice (Ex. 5:2)?

They despise the truth, stifle conviction of conscience, persecute God's people, harden themselves against the gospel message, and say in their heart,

We will not have the man Christ Jesus to reign over us (see Luke 19:14).

I have lately met one of these, to whom I kindly said, "Have you ever felt that you are a sinner in the sight of God?" His reply was, "I never talk on that subject." The wondrous love of God to sinful man, that fills all heaven with praise and glory, was a subject too mean and trifling to be worthy of the contemplation of such a great mind as he thought he possessed. Such, however, must

make haste and comedown (Luke 19:5)

to the Savior of sinners, if they would escape the fiery wrath and eternal indignation that is so quickly coming upon the impenitent and unbelieving.

There is another class of persons very different from these, but who equally need to come down.

Their curiosity is excited in religious matters, but they have neither a guilty conscience nor a

broken heart (Psa. 34:18),

and are, personally, strangers to the joy of Christ's salvation. They like to hear this man and that — go here and there — make what they call religious acquaintances, and take pleasure in understanding every thing that is doing in the so-called religious world. Their minds are more or less exercised about the merits or demerits of various doctrines and outward rites, and the prosperity or failure, the orthodox or erroneous views, of those around them. They know well the difference between Judaism, Mohammedanism, Popery, and Christianity; and, giving preference to the last on this list, they watch with interest some of its outward operations and results. They are acquainted with the letter of Scripture, and bow to the claims of morality and benevolence; but, alas! the conscience has not been exercised before God; they are strangers to the tears of a contrite heart, and know nothing about the new birth. As some persons manifest curiosity in investigating the different branches of science, and take deep interest in watching the various actions of cause and effect, so these people carry the same spirit of curiosity and intellectual gratification in matters of religion as they call it; and, comparing themselves with some others, take pride in their measure of intelligence, instead of taking the place of

shame and confusion of face (see Ezra 9:7, Psa. 44:15),

on account of their iniquity, transgression, and sin against God. But curiosity is to be dreaded as much as self-righteousness, or proud infidelity; all must

come down,

if such would be partakers of Christ's salvation, and realize peace with God through the blood of the cross.

A sense of absolute necessity compels souls to

come down

to receive the Savior. We take refuge in Him; because He is the only hope. We fly to His outstretched arms, knowing we must perish for ever without Him. With self-abasement we renounce our filthy rags of self-righteousness, and gladly welcome the

best robe (Luke 15:22).

All, therefore, that have truly found salvation, have experienced what it is to

come down;

to lay aside creature-merit and fancied goodness in every form, and receive salvation as lost and undone, as the free gift of God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

But our Lord commanded Zacchæus to

make haste (Luke 19:5).

How important this is! How many there are who in heart say,

Not yet (see Acts 24:25)!

Like Felix, they sometimes tremble under the word preached, but postpone the further consideration of it to

a more convenient season (Acts 24:25);

yet it is to be feared that with some

a more convenient season

never comes. There are others who, like Agrippa, are almost persuaded to be Christians, but are never altogether so, because they continually put off the personal application of the truth. When my family is grown up and settled, says one; when my business matters are over, says another; when I am free from present occupation, says a third; then I will attend to the state of my soul. Thus they reject Christ and His salvation. The farm, the merchandise, family duties, social obligations, and necessary occupations, are all cleverly pleaded by man's desperately wicked and deceitful heart, as reasons for rejecting Christ and His great salvation. Still, however, the loving Savior cries,

Make haste!

it is, therefore positive disobedience to delay.

Compel them to come in (Luke 14:23)!

He says; it is therefore rebellion to object.

Come unto the marriage (Matt. 22:4)!

He proclaims by His servants; is it not, therefore, despising Him and His message still to linger without? How very solemn this is! How few persons seem to be sensible of the vast responsibility connected with the preaching of the gospel of God! How little men think when they hear, and they do not

make haste and come down,

that they reject the gospel of the grace of God, and thus close the only door of escape from eternal burning, and the only way of admission into glory! Oh that my readers would ponder again our Lord's declaration,

He that believeth not shall be damned (Mark 16:16)!

How important it is that men should

make haste and come down

to the Savior's feet. Who knows of whom it will be next said,

This night thy soul shall be required of thee (Luke 12:20)?

How very soon the divine mandate may go forth,

Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live (2 Kings 20:1).

How sad, then, to put off the solemn consideration of the soul's salvation! How perilous to say, "It is time enough yet," when we do not know what a day may bring forth! To-day is the day of salvation; but we do not know what to-morrow will be.

Choose you this day,

said Joshua,

whom ye will serve (Josh. 24:15).

And the Psalmist exclaimed,

To day if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts (Heb. 3:7, 8; 3:15; 4:7).

To day I must abide at thy house (Luke 19:5),

said our Lord to Zacchæus.

To day shalt thou be with me in paradise (Luke 23:43),

said the Savior to the believing malefactor. Now the gospel is preached. Now the Savior welcomes returning prodigals. Now He commands all men everywhere to repent. Now He says,

Make haste and come down.

But soon He will come forth in glory to put all enemies under His feet. How eternally important it is, then, that persons should now receive the Savior whom God hath sent?

3. THE BLESSEDNESS OF RECEIVING JESUS, AND ITS RESULTS. We are told that Zacchæus

made haste, and came down, and received Him joyfully (Luke 19:6).

This is very simple, yet touching. The Savior always means what He says; He is always as good as His word. He told the sinful publican that He must abide at his house that day, and He did so; and the reason the Lord gave for being the guest of such a sinful man as this wealthy son of Abraham was, that He came to

seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:10).

Zacchæus then received Jesus — not peculiar views, or rites, or ordinances, but the Lord Himself. He believed that the Lord of glory loved him, and had come from heaven to save such a sinful and unworthy creature. This marvelous grace not only comforted him, but humbled him into a spirit of self-judgment and confession, and also constrained him to serve and follow Christ.

No one can receive Jesus without being happy. Zacchæus

received Him joyfully.

Present as well as eternal blessing is the portion of those who received the Lord Jesus:

As many as received Him, to them gave He power (or privilege) to become the sons of God (John 1:12).

To know the love of God in Christ His Son to us, as sinful and ungodly, in eternal deliverance from condemnation, and the fullness of its unchanging perfectness, fills the soul with joy and peace.

Salvation is immediately the portion of those who receive the Lord Jesus.

This day is salvation come to this house (Luke 19:9).

Man's thought naturally is, that he must worship and serve God now, and risk being eventually saved; but God's way is to give us salvation at once, and to receive our service and worship, because we are saved. Paul taught the Corinthian saints this doctrine. He says,

But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified

. . . Ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's (1 Cor. 6:11, 19, 20).

But how wonderful is the blessing of present salvation, the knowledge that Christ Himself is now our life and righteousness, and that because He lives, we shall live also!

"More happy, but not more secure, The souls of the blessed in heaven."

The believer is also brought into fellowship with the Son of God. Eating together is a mark, not only of friendship, but of love and equality. David showed the kindness of God to Mephibosheth, by commanding that he should eat bread with him at his table continually, as one of the king's sons. Jesus might have saved Zacchæus without becoming his guest; but the love of Christ not only saves, but calls us into fellowship with Himself, and brings us into the Father's presence, as sons of God and brethren of Christ; loved by the Father as the Father loved Christ. This is unutterable love; but so it is, and it is our privilege to enjoy it.

But further. Zacchæus was exercised about godly walk, and commending himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God. This must always be the result of knowing salvation by Christ. We then feel that we are not only God's creatures, but God's children; and we serve Him not only from duty, but from choice. We fear not, then, Divine wrath, but fear lest we grieve One who so perfectly loves us.

Not my will, but thine, be done (Luke 22:42),

must be, more or less, the utterance of all believers, and this brings exercise of heart and conscience concerning our daily walk and circumstances. Remembering how much we have been forgiven makes it easy to forgive others; and a sense of the Divine kindness and mercy we have received constrains us to take pleasure in loving and serving others. The knowledge that the world has crucified the holy, loving Son of God, and that it is hastening on to its fearful judgment, makes us feel thankful that we are not of the world, but are rescued out of it, in wondrous grace, by the atoning death of Christ; and the blessed hope, that when Christ shall appear we shall be like Him, directs our souls upward and onward to the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. Thus we see that present happiness, salvation, fellowship, and godly walk, are at once connected with receiving the Lord Jesus.

But what an awful doom awaits those who do not

make haste, and come down

and receive the Savior! Jesus said,

If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins (John 8:24).

Thus we see that those who do not now

make haste

to come to the Lord Jesus for salvation are making haste on the broad road to destruction; and those who do not now

come down

at the bidding of the Savior's gospel, will be cast down into outer darkness at the command of the Judge of all. Then eternity, eternity, must for ever shut out all hope and mercy; for weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, in darkness and despair, must be the unchanging portion of those who obey not the Savior's call.

Once more, dear reader, let me say,

Make haste,

delay not, hesitate no longer, linger no more, at once decide, and

come down

to the loving arms of the Savior, whose blood cleanseth from all sin; and salvation, with all its present and eternal blessings, will be your portion for ever. May the Holy Spirit enable you to do so!

"Thine, alas! a lost condition,

Works cannot work thee remission,

Nor thy goodness do thee good;

Death's within thee, — all about thee,

But the remedy's without thee —

See it in thy Savior's blood!"

Who Are Christ's Sheep?

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand (John 10:27, 28).

There were religious people all around, but were they Christ's sheep? This was the all-important question. There was

the hireling (John 10:13)

too, and

the thief (John 10:10), the stranger (John 10:5)

and

the wolf (John 10:12);

but oh, how different from the Good Shepherd! We cannot forget that there are still many sheep round about us who are very dear to the heart of Jesus. He calls them

His own sheep (John 10:3).

They belong to Him. He loved them, and gave Himself for them. He said,

The Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep (John 10:11).

What amazing love!

"When blood from a victim must flow,

This Shepherd by pity was led

To stand between us and the foe,

And willingly died in our stead."

One characteristic of Christ's sheep is, that they hear His voice. No matter who may be the instrument, the question with them is, Is it Christ's voice? What is He saying? This is one mark of the sheep of Christ from first to last.

They know not the voice of strangers (John 10:5),

but the Shepherd's voice they well know. It is Jesus they love to hear. When Paul went to Thessalonica, they received his testimony because it was God's truth. They were not taken up with the servant, but with the message that he brought. They owned it to be God's testimony. In it they heard the voice of the Good Shepherd, who laid down His life for the sheep. They did not receive the testimony as Paul's opinions; for it came to them,

not . . . in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance (1 Thess. 1:5);

they therefore

turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come (1 Thess. 1:9).

When Paul went to the polished citizens of Corinth, he purposely sought to preach in simple language; and though he was a learned man, he laid aside eloquent and enticing words of man's wisdom, lest the people should hear only Paul's voice, and not receive God's testimony, and thus their faith stand in the wisdom of men instead of the power of God. Thus they heard and received God's truth about the Lord Jesus; they heard the voice of Jesus the Good Shepherd through Paul.

The question is, What is the Lord Jesus, who is seated on the right hand of God in the heavens, saying now? If He were now to speak in an audible voice, would it not be,

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life (John 5:24)?

Surely this is His testimony. See, then, that you refuse not His voice who speaketh from heaven. The believer looks up to heaven, beholds the face of Jesus by faith, hearkens to His word, and receives His testimony. Christ's sheep hear His voice. Many know the way of salvation, but have not received Christ as their Savior. They do not hear His voice in the gospel.

Ye believe not,

said Jesus,

because ye are not of my sheep (John 10:26).

Christ knows His sheep. True it is that He knows all things; but He peculiarly knows His own. The acquaintance is mutual. They know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent, and He knows them.

He knoweth them that trust in Him (Nah. 1:7).

Many a professor will come in that day, saying,

Have we not prophesied in thy name? . . . and in thy name done many wonderful works? (Matt. 7:22)

but Jesus will say unto them,

I never knew you: depart from me (Matt. 7:22).

They never had any acquaintance with Christ — had no personal dealing with Him. Have you, dear friends, known this personal intimacy with Jesus? Have you known what it is to be reconciled to God through the death of His Son? Those who know Christ, however feebly, do not hesitate to cast themselves into His open arms, and such always prove Him to be a Friend that loveth at all times, a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother.

“Happy they who trust in Jesus!

Sweet their portion is and sure;

When the foe on others seizes,

He will keep His own secure:

Happy people!

Even though despised and poor.”

Another feature in Christ's sheep is, that having heard His voice, and being assured that Christ knows them, it leads to practical action — they follow Christ. This is not following rules, creeds, ordinances, however true in themselves they may be, but Christ. It is not following men, however godly they may be, further than they are following Christ. This Satan hates, and tries to hinder. He would sometimes use even Christian people, who may be in a bad state of soul, to hinder others from wholly following the Lord. He has left us an example that we should follow His steps. We are kept here for no other object than to follow Christ; not to follow our own inclinations, nor to follow other saints, but to follow Christ. This marks Christ's sheep. Jesus said,

They follow me (John 10:27).

Do we know what this is? Are we searching the Scriptures to find out His steps, that we may follow Him? Are we, through honor and dishonor, seeking only to please Him? Are we aiming to be

meek and lowly in heart (Matt. 11:29)

as He was? to take His yoke upon us, and learn of Him? We are told that Christ's sheep are thus exercised; they follow Christ. It does not say they ought to do so, but that they do follow Christ. This shows them to be Christ's sheep.

Now, mark the security of Christ's sheep.

1st. They have everlasting life.

I give unto them eternal life (John 10:28).

This is His gift. It is in no way earned or deserved. No.

The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 6:23).

Eternal life, then, comes to us in the way of gift. Christ does not give less. It is not life for a day or a year, but for ever — eternal life. Your life is hid with Christ in God. Christ is our life. Christ is the Giver, the sinner the receiver. My dear reader, have you really received this gift of God? Have you eternal life? I trust you will not rest for a moment, till you are certain that you have eternal life. Oh, you must have eternal life, or you will be in everlasting burnings!

He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him (John 3:36).

2nd.

They shall never perish (John 10:28).

What perfect rest and peace this gives the soul; for He is faithful that promised; He cannot deny Himself. David's fear and distress were not a little that he would one day perish by the hand of Saul; but the true believer need have no misgiving as to the eternal future. He who is almighty in power and perfect in love says,

They shall never perish.

Observe, it is absolute and unconditional —

They shall never perish.

Dear trembling believer, you cannot be lost. You are in Christ. You have eternal life, and Christ declares you

shall never perish.

He died for you. His blood cleanseth from all sin.

Your life is hid with Christ in God (Col. 3:3).

What more can you need to give you perfect rest of soul?

3rd.

“Not all that earth or hell can say, Shall turn His heart of love away.”

When He said,

Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out (John 6:37),

it implied three things: —

1st. I will receive.

2nd. I will hold him fast; and

3rd. I will never give him up —

in no wise cast out.

So here He says,

None shall pluck them out of my hand.

What perfect security this gives! Surely it is a threefold cord, that can never be broken.

1st. The present possession of
eternal life.

2nd. The promise of the faithful and Good Shepherd —

They shall never perish.

3rd. Christ's own almighty hand keeping firmly in its grasp —

None shall pluck them out of my hand.

All dear children of God do not enter into the joy of these precious realities. They read men's books, and embrace men's opinions, instead of going only to the Scriptures for God's mind, and resting on His precious words about Jesus, which can never pass away.

"NEVER perish!" words of mercy,

Coming from the lips of One

Who, though here a homeless stranger,

Fills the high eternal throne;

Brightness of the Father's glory,

God and man in One combined;

Faithful Shepherd of the chosen,

Safe are those to Him assigned.

"Never perish!" words of sweetness,

Dissipating every fear;

Filling all with joy and gladness,

Who the Shepherd's voice can hear;

Bringing richest consolation

To the soul fatigued, oppressed;

Sweet refreshment to the fainting,

And to weary spirits rest.

"Never perish!" words of power;

Satan now I can defy:

Safe my soul beyond my keeping,

Hid with Christ in God on high.

Come what will, I'm safe for ever —

'Tis the promise of my God;

Written in His word unfailing,

Sealed with Jesus' precious blood.

Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand (John 10:28).

The word *man* is in italics. It shows us that no power shall be able to separate us from Christ's keeping.

The Birth of Jesus

Where is he that is born King of the Jews? (Matt. 2:2).

The birth of Jesus was an event as full of love as it was deep in wisdom and humiliation; but it was what Jehovah had ages before promised, and patriarchs had long looked for. When man disobeyed his Maker, and fell under Satan's power, God, in boundless grace, lighted up the dark and hopeless scene with the most merciful declaration, that the Seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head; thus announcing a Redeemer for fallen man, and that He should be born of a woman. Afterward, the Lord taught Abraham that the promised Seed should be through him and his much-loved son Isaac.

In Isaac shall thy seed be called (Gen. 21:12).

After this, it was revealed to David that the promised Seed should be of the fruit of his loins, and also that after His death and resurrection He should sit upon Israel's throne. At a later period, the prophet Isaiah was moved by the Holy Ghost to predict that the Savior would be a virgin's son:

Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel (Isa. 7:14).

And more than this, for he also spake of the Godhead of Christ, as well as His reigning in power, as the King of the Jews, on the throne of His father David, saying,

Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this (Isa. 9:6, 7).

Still later, the prophet Micah was instructed to inform God's people of the locality where Jesus should be born:

But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting (Micah 5:2).

From these Scriptures we see that the Messiah would be born of a woman — God and man in one person — a virgin's son — born in Bethlehem — of the seed of Abraham — of the lineage of David — whose goings forth have been from everlasting — that He shall sit on the throne of His father David, and of His kingdom there shall be no end.

We can thus enter a little into the question of the wise men,

Where is He that is born King of the Jews? (Matt. 2:2)

In the last dispensation many were looking forward to the coming of Messiah to reign in glory. They expected the fulfilment of the prophetic Scriptures concerning His kingdom, and overlooked the path of humiliation, suffering, blood-shedding, and death, as Messiah's way to David's throne. They did not see that God's only way of setting man in blessing before Him was through death and resurrection. There were, however, a few that

looked for redemption in Jerusalem (Luke 2:38).

In this chapter we find three classes of character brought before us:

1. Herod;
2. The chief priests and scribes;
3. The wise men;

— which, by the Lord's help, it may be profitable for us to consider.

1. HEROD. Herod was king at Jerusalem; he was, therefore, exceedingly moved at the announcement that the King of the Jews was born. It touched him very closely; for he knew that if the true Messiah were come, he could no longer be king himself. Besides, the sound of God's King having come was enough to alarm the conscience, and awaken fear and dread. Others felt the same. We are therefore told that,

when Herod the king heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him (Matt. 2:3).

There were no thunderings or lightnings — no threatenings — no sound of alarm; yet they were troubled. Angels had sung,

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men (Luke 2:14).

A believing man afterwards exclaimed,

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace: . . . for mine eyes have seen thy salvation (Luke 2:29, 30).

Yet

Herod and all Jerusalem were troubled (see Matt. 2:3).

The king's troubled state of mind led him to make inquiry. He first gathered those together whom he judged best able to give him information, and demanded of them where Christ should be born. But though their reply was correct, it did not relieve his trouble. He then made diligent inquiry of the wise men, but their reply must have only tended to confirm the fact that Messiah was really come. What could Herod do? His perplexity was great; fear and sorrow were experienced by him; but with all the amount of unquestionable evidence before him, he did not think the Messiah worth seeking. He therefore dismissed the wise men, that they should seek the young child; but it was not in the king's heart to go a step on such an errand.

Bring me word again,

said the king,

that I may come and worship Him also (Matt. 2:8).

If I find so-and-so, then I'll worship," thought Herod. He had no higher thought, and this was his only relief for a troubled mind. Poor Herod! The real state of his soul was afterwards made manifest: pride kindled into a flame the enmity against God and against His Christ which dwelt in his unregenerate heart; he became

exceeding wroth (Matt. 2:16),

and could only vent his rage by commanding that every young child in Bethlehem, and all the coasts thereof, should be put to death; thus expecting to get rid of his troubles by killing Him who was born King of the Jews. Such is man. Such has been, and still is, the enmity of the carnal mind to the blessed Christ of God. Men hear the faithful saying, that

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners (1 Tim. 1:15);

they are exercised about the report for a while, fears lay hold on them, and they are troubled. They make inquiry — they hear the Scriptures read and expounded — they turn to God's servants, and listen to their statements on these matters — they hear them say that it is their chiefest joy to contemplate and adoringly worship the Savior of sinners, and they seek to quiet their troubled spirits by promising to themselves to worship also at some future time. But, as in Herod's case, that time never comes. Like him, their convictions are not deep, being more from the force of circumstances and the influence of others, than from personal exercise before God; they therefore think of nothing higher than worshipping before men. There is no earnest desire for forgiveness of sins — no longing for the removal of guilt — no consideration of how matters really are between their own souls and the living God; they have no concern beyond some vague ideas of worship, places of worship, forms of worship, and the like. However, this state of mind having been brought about by circumstances, it is only for circumstances to change, and they change also. Like the early dew, such superficial impressions quickly pass away; the natural enmity to Christ easily manifests itself, and they soon cry out in spirit, with the Christless crowd around,

Not this man, but Barabbas (John 18:40)!

My reader, may I ask if you have ever been troubled when you have heard the gospel of God? If so, may I also affectionately ask you to examine into the cause of your trouble? Has it arisen from fear of change in your outward circumstances? or has it been from a deep conscientious sense of your having sinned against God, and therefore being justly exposed to His eternal condemnation? The last is the godly sorrow, that worketh repentance unto salvation not to be repented of; and if such be your experience, you will not be content that others should seek the Savior, and bring you word again, but you will seek Him for yourself. Your need will compel you. Your heartfelt cry will be,

Lord, save, or I perish (see Matt. 8:25)!

You will take refuge in the Lord Jesus Christ to save you. You will not be satisfied at merely outwardly mingling with others in worship; you will not rest till you know the forgiveness of your sins and peace with God.

Oh, my reader, beware of hypocrisy! Remember Herod. Beware of anything less than coming to Christ to save you. Do not be content at feeling a little troubled, or with a little inquiry into Scripture, or of resting in some good intentions, or any well-meant promises as to the future; yea, I repeat, beware of anything short of coming to Jesus for the salvation of your soul. Then, and then only, will you be safe; for He said,

Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out (John 6:37).

2. THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES. There was neither trouble, nor inquiry, nor wrath, manifested by these persons. Quiet and unconcerned, with Scripture ready upon their lips, they cared no more about the Messiah than they did about Herod. Yet they had a remarkable knowledge of Scripture. They could tell where Christ should be born. They heard the solemn announcement that the Messiah was come. They listened to the wise men's testimony, that the God of heaven and earth had commanded a star to move out of its accustomed sphere to guide them, and yet they were unmoved and unconcerned. Their knowledge of the letter of Scripture had puffed them up. In their folly they thought themselves wise, and knew not that they were miserable, blind, and naked: One might have thought that such a momentous matter as the birth of Christ would have stirred up the hardest hearts; but no! man's motto is, "Present gratification, without reference to the eternal future." These scribes were accredited by men, honored by the king; they felt that they held the key of knowledge, were masters in Israel, were greeted by the people's "Rabbi," and this was enough; for they sought only "present gratification," and cared not for "the eternal future."

It is to be feared that there are many of this class in the present day. They possess some knowledge of Scripture, can answer many questions even about the Savior, and are quiet and unconcerned when others around them are much troubled. They know not their real need. They compare themselves with the ignorant idolater, and think themselves wise. They flatter themselves that they have been born in a Christian country, had Christian forefathers, have received a religious education, and attend an orthodox ministry; and therefore are not ignorant of spiritual matters. But with all their fancied knowledge,

they are ignorant of God's righteousness (see Rom. 10:3).

They know not that, if weighed in God's balance, they must be found wanting. They are ignorant of the fact, that all their best performances are only splendid sins. They are not aware that they must be born again. They know not the gift of God. They are ignorant that the thrice Holy God cannot accept any excuse for sin, and can accredit no other standard of righteousness than His own unsullied holiness. They therefore go about to establish their own righteousness, and do not submit to the righteousness of God, even CHRIST, who is

the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth (Rom. 10:4).

Oh, my reader, flee from all these snares of the great deceiver. Listen to the word of the living God that will never pass away. Remember there is salvation in none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the only way. There is no other entrance to glory. The question of such eternal importance is not what you know, or what people think of you, but what you think of CHRIST. Oh, ponder the decisive words of the apostle,

If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed (see 1 Cor. 16:22)!

3. THE WISE MEN. Whatever were the peculiar characteristics of these men, they were in the best sense wise men. They were guided by Divine light and wisdom. They had to do with God. When they saw the star move, they were assured that God was leading them; and they happily experienced that He led them to the Savior. They sought for Jesus. Nothing could hinder them. Christ Himself was the one object of their souls, and they found Him. They owned Him as the mighty God. They worshipped Him. They served Him with their substance as well as their hearts. It was to Christ they presented their gold, frankincense, and myrrh. We may also notice another thing in these wise men, they obeyed God rather than man; for being warned of God that they should not return to Herod (as he commanded), they departed into their own country another way. The account of these wise men is very simple and brief, but their ways stand in remarkable contrast with the other classes of character that are here clustered together.

Oh, my reader! while I warn you against the pernicious ways of Herod and the scribes, I entreat you solemnly to consider whether you are like these wise men. They submitted to God's teaching; have you? They sought and found the Savior; have you? They worshipped Him, and served Him with their costliest goods; have you? When they found that man commanded one thing and God another, they obeyed God rather than man; have you?

Hitherto we have only looked at the King of the Jews in reference to His birth; but grand and glorious as that event was, we afterwards see Him in a position far more blessed for our contemplation than even that. I refer to Calvary's cross. Yes, it is the cross of Christ that is the happy meeting-place between God and man. No death of the cross, there could have been no triumph over death. No death of the cross, there could have been no salvation from hell. No death of the cross, this world would have been without one cheering ray as to the future. No death of the cross, not one sinner could have ever reached the mansions of glory. But the blessed gospel declares that Christ has died. The Scriptures most prominently set forth the eternal value of Christ's death, and our Lord taught the same thing. He said,

Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit (John 12:24).

The believer's peace with God is only through the atoning work of Christ. We are justified by His blood, sanctified by His blood; we have access into God's presence, where our High Priest is, by His blood. It is in the death of Jesus we see God's wondrous love to man so abundantly manifested. There we see that Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it. There we see that the King of the Jews died for that nation. There we see that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. There we see God's infinite hatred of sin, and His amazing love to sinners. There Jesus bare our sins in His own body. There He was made sin for us. There His soul was made an offering for sin. There He once suffered under God's wrath, that we might receive eternal peace and blessing.

The King of the Jews was put to death on the accursed tree; for

it was expedient that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not . . . and not for that nation only, but that He should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad (see John 11:49, 52).

On that solemn occasion cruel Pilate appeared to be conscious that Jesus was the King of the Jews; for he not only asked the blessed Lord if He were the King of the Jews, but just before he delivered Him to be crucified, he turned to the people, saying,

Behold your King! (John 19:14)

Shall I crucify your King? (John 19:15)

Pilate also wrote a title, and put it on the cross, in the three leading languages of the world, and the writing was,

JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS (John 19:19);

and so steadfast was Pilate in His purpose, that when the chief priests said unto him,

Write not, The King of the Jews; but that He said, I am King of the Jews (John 19:21),

he replied,

What I have written I have written (John 19:22).

God, doubtless, had a purpose in all this; and though the nation of Israel refused to own their King then, it will yet be their joy, at Christ's second coming, to know that they have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace (See Rom. 11:27).

"Smitten, stricken, and afflicted,

See Him hanging on the tree;

'Tis the Christ by men rejected,

Yes, my soul, 'tis He, 'tis He!"

But where is the King of the Jews now? He was in Bethlehem's stable, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and worshipped by the wise men. He was recognized by a guileless Israelite as

the Son of God and the King of Israel (see John 1:49).

As the meek and lowly King, riding on an ass over the Mount of Olives, He was worshipped as

the King that cometh in the name of the Lord (Luke 19:38).

He was covered with a purple robe, and mocked with a crown of thorns. He was publicly crucified with malefactors, outside the gate of Jerusalem, as

Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews (John 19:19).

But where, I ask, is the King of the Jews now? He is no longer on the cross, no longer in the sepulcher; but though crucified in weakness, He rose from the dead by almighty power, spoiled principalities and powers, and, in risen beauty and glory, amid the ceaseless rejoicings of the unnumbered dazzling hosts of heaven, the King of the Jews was welcomed to the throne of the Majesty of the heavens, and crowned with glory and honor. Israel's rejected King, then, is risen — raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, and exalted to the highest heavens. But the Jews, as yet, know it not. They are still in blindness and unbelief, fulfilling the prophecy of Hosea:

For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image (pillar), and without an ephod, and without teraphim (Hos. 3:4).

They are still scattered among the Gentiles, while their holy city is in heaps because of their sin; they are

broken off because of unbelief (see Rom. 11:20).

But we are told that God is able to graft them in again. Yes, God is able to cause the scales to fall from their eyes, so that a nation may be born at once. He is able to gather the outcasts of Israel, and bring them into their own land.

Afterward,

saith Hosea in the next verse,

shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days (Hos. 3:5).

Then the Jews will be joyful in their king, who will

reign . . . before His ancients gloriously (Isa. 24:23);

will be caught up to meet Him in the air. He will appear in glory, and His saints with Him. As King of the Jews, He will reign over the house of Jacob. As the last Adam, creation shall be manifestly in subjection to Him, being delivered from the bondage of corruption; and as King over all the earth, all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before Him; for with flaming fire and vengeance He shall put all enemies under His feet. Happy are those who can now sincerely say,

Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly (see Rev. 22:20).

Now, dear reader, He saves to the uttermost, and He will save you, if you come to Him. Oh, may the language of your heart be —

“A guilty, weak, and helpless worm,

On thy kind arms I fall;

Thou art my Lord and righteousness,

My Savior, and my all.”

and

Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit (Isa. 27:6).

But then it will not be on carnal grounds, but in free, sovereign grace, through the redemption-work of Him who died for that nation. They will then know Christ crucified to be their sacrifice, Christ risen to be their lawgiver, Christ exalted to be their High Priest, Christ glorified to be their King. They will then experience the blessings of the new covenant, spoken of by Jeremiah the prophet:

After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. . . . They shall all know me, from the least of

them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jer. 31:33, 34).

Now, while the Lord Jesus is rejected by the nation of the Jews, God is sending His gospel into all the world, to gather out of the Gentiles a people for His name. A Jew here and there receives the gospel, as many have before; so that the Church of God is formed both of Jews and Gentiles, united in one body in Christ — one new man — made nigh to God in Christ and by His blood.

The reign of Christ was spoken of by the angel to Mary in connection with His birth:

Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a Son, and shalt call His name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David: and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end (Luke 1:31-33).

We can therefore understand why Peter referred to the Lord's appearing, when addressing the people at Jerusalem, saying,

He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began (Acts 3:20).

To these times of restitution we are rapidly hastening. The Lord will soon descend from heaven. His Church, His beloved bride,

Peace for the Anxious; or, the Serpent of Brass

And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived (Num. 21:8, 9).

The only way of salvation is most plainly set before us in various parts of the Old Testament Scriptures. Let us look at some of them. We are told that Abel obtained witness that he was righteous, by coming before God with the sacrifice of a lamb; while Cain, with all his efforts to bring the fruit of his own toil, was rejected. Noah and his family were saved by being inside the ark which God had commanded to be built, while every person outside the ark perished. Lot's mocking sons-in-law died under God's fiery judgment of Sodom, because they remained in the place which God had said he would destroy, and refused to escape for their lives. The Israelites in Egypt were saved from the vengeance of the destroying angel, because they took shelter in God's only remedy — the blood of the lamb. The manslayer escaped the forfeit of his life by fleeing to the city of refuge. The loathsome leper was at once cleansed by being sprinkled with blood. Rahab was saved in the destruction of Jericho, because the scarlet line was in her window. The serpent of brass set upon a pole was another testimony to the simple way of eternal salvation, which God provided for sinful men.

Many true-hearted souls have not peace with God, because they do not see the simplicity of the gospel. They do not allow their thoughts to be regulated by the written word of God, as the only standard of truth, or regard the Holy Spirit as the only Teacher and Revealer of the things of Christ; consequently there is no fixedness of thought, and no solid rest for their troubled minds. Unless the conscience be thoroughly convicted of the total ruin and depravity of the natural man, it is not prepared to receive the full testimony of God's abounding grace; and unless the mind be freed from human opinions, it will not perceive the beautiful simplicity of the gospel of God! Hence it is that so many sincere souls, who have been quickened by the Holy Ghost, go doubting and fearing nearly all their days. They either look within for certain feelings, attainments, evidences, and the like, instead of looking wholly to Christ; or, if they look to Christ, they think that something else is required, instead of receiving simply what God says in His word concerning the finished work of His beloved Son, and the safety and security of all those who come unto God by Him. Let no burdened sinner expect peace with God but by looking wholly to Christ crucified and risen, and believing God's record of the value of His finished work on the cross.

The story of the serpent of brass is calculated, by the Spirit's teaching, to give peace to anxious souls, because it so plainly sets forth the way of God in grace with men as ruined sinners. Our blessed Lord expounded it to Nicodemus, so that we have not only the inspired narrative, but also the Divine comment upon it, as teaching us the only way of eternal salvation. The testimony of Moses, by the Spirit in the Old Testament, and the explanation of Christ Himself in the New, stamp the subject with the deepest interest and importance. Little, perhaps, did the ancient lawgiver feel,

when lifting up the brazen serpent in order that the dying Israelite might behold it and live, that he was shadowing forth that unequalled event, when Christ, in unparalleled love, was willingly lifted up upon the cross for the salvation of lost sinners. But so it was, as the Lord Himself touchingly testified, when He said,

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:14, 15).

There are three points in this narrative which demand our solemn consideration.

1. The condition of the people.
2. The remedy God provided.
3. The effects.

1. THE CONDITION OF THE PEOPLE. The people had sinned. They had murmured against God, and justly brought His judgment and wrath upon them. They were, therefore, under sentence of death; for sin and death are connected together. The wages of sin always has been, and always will be, death. Much people of Israel had died, and many more were dying; they were under the influence of the serpent's bite, and it was mortal. Nothing, therefore, could be more hopeless than their state; they might not have believed it, but so it was. They might have tried human remedies, because man always contrives to better his present distress if he can; but we may be sure that these remedies all failed. They were made to feel that the serpent's bite was beyond their power of healing; therefore they asked Moses to take away the serpents from them: but this was not God's way of meeting the case. The people, then, had sinned, were mortally wounded, without any power of ameliorating their condition, and without any human hope of deliverance.

And such, too, is man's real condition before God now. The bitten, dying Israelites present to us a touching picture of tens of thousands, yea, millions, around us now. Man has sinned. He is a sinner in a threefold sense. He is a sinner by birth, as a descendant of fallen parents; a sinner by practice, as having actually transgressed God's holy commands; and a sinner in heart, as having sin dwelling in him, so that he is inwardly desperately wicked. But more than this, for most persons have added to all these the crowning sin of not believing in the only-begotten Son of God — not receiving that Savior whom God hath sent. The Holy Spirit has come to convict men that they are sinners, to show them that they are dead in trespasses and sins, and exposed to eternal death and condemnation. Surely nothing can be more hopeless than man's condition as under sin and death; nothing can be more helpless, because, with all his inventions to better his circumstances, he has never yet devised a remedy for death. He diligently projects moral schemes for lopping off the wide-spreading branches of outward infamy, but the stump still remains the stock of a corrupt tree. Man cannot devise a cure for death. He tries to smooth the dying pillow with the tear of sympathy, and refreshing cordials; he may embellish the corpse with the costliest ornaments, and the sweetest spices; he can make the most attractive display at the grave; he can garnish the sepulcher with skilful adornments; but he cannot cure the serpent's bite, he cannot triumph over death. He sees death all around him, and feels dying himself, and he is without strength and without hope in the world.

Men little think what an admission they make when they say, "We are sinners." It really means, we have death working in us because we have sinned — we are dead in trespasses and sins, and on the way to eternal death. Such is really the meaning of the common expression, "I know that I'm a sinner." Oh that the Holy Spirit would tear away the veil of ignorance and unbelief from men's minds, and so convict multitudes everywhere, that, like the prophet of old, they may cry out,

Woe is me! for I am undone (Isa. 6:5).

Our condition, then, naturally, is similar to that of the bitten Israelites. They had sinned, so have we. They were guilty before God, so are we. They were justly condemned, so are we. They were dying because of their sin, so are we. They were unable to save themselves, so are we. Neither they nor ourselves had any hope whatever, till God, in free, boundless mercy, provided a remedy. Let us now consider —

2. THE REMEDY GOD PROVIDED. Why should God provide a remedy? Did the people deserve it? No. They had sinned, and merited God's righteous indignation. But their need, their helpless state, moved God's compassion and mercy, and He brought life and salvation to the dying and needy. The thought of the people was merely to have the serpents taken away from them — they only thought of some improvement in their present circumstances; but God's thoughts of love and pity are far higher than this. His way is to give life to dying souls — to abolish death; He therefore provided such a remedy, that whoever LOOKED upon it LIVED. This is a remedy worthy of the God of resurrection. It never entered into man's heart to conceive a remedy so perfect, so suitable; so glorious, so abundant in mercy.

The Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live (Num. 21:8).

The remedy was simple, and the cure immediate. It was not a question of their doings, experiences, or evidences; it was look and live. They were commanded to look outside themselves, straight to the object set before them, and, though at the point of death, they immediately lived. Those who felt the mortal wound inflicted by the fiery serpent had simply to behold the serpent of brass set upon the pole, and death in them gave place to life.

The remedy then was one, only one. It was lifted up between earth and heaven. It was wholly of God's providing. The benefit was conferred by simply looking. It was perfect and instantaneous in its cure. It needed nothing to be added to it. It was free to every bitten man, without money and without price. No one tried it in vain. Those who did not behold it died.

Such is God's remedy for dying souls now. It is Jesus only. He has been lifted up between earth and heaven. He died for sinners — for those who are dead in trespasses and sins. This only remedy is entirely of God's providing. His compassion and free grace sent forth the Savior; for

God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8).

It is sin that is the plague of our hearts, and in Jesus crucified we see sin condemned, and removed for ever from us; for there God hath made Christ

to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5:21).

On the cross it was that Christ was lifted up, that He might bring us to God.

The benefits, too, of God's salvation are realized by simply looking. It is,

Look unto me, and be ye saved (Isa. 45:22).

Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved (Acts 16:31).

By Him; all that believe are justified from all things (Acts 13:39).

Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out (John 6:37).

It is free to every one who desires it.

He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life (John 6:47) By me if any man enter in, he shall be saved (John 10:9). Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Matt. 11:28).

Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely (Rev. 22:17).

God also gives an immediate and perfect cure.

He that believeth on me,

said Jesus,

hath everlasting life (John 6:47).

He that believeth is justified by His blood, shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life; for by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. He hath obtained eternal redemption for us.

The Israelites, by looking to the serpent of brass, only had temporal life; but, by looking unto the Lord Jesus, we have eternal life. This is the mercy of the gospel, as our Lord declared,

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:14, 15).

It is not, then, ordinances, duties, self-denial, outward zeal, however proper these things may be in their place, but Christ and Him crucified that meets the sinner's need. He alone has triumphed over death. He only is the life, the truth, the way to the Father. He is the only Mediator between God and men. His blood the only fountain for sin and uncleanness. His death alone satisfied Divine justice. On Jesus, on the cross, God's fierce wrath was poured out, and His infinite holiness and truth vindicated. It is the death of Jesus on the cross that fully manifests man's ungodliness, and fully reveals God's abounding grace. Nowhere is sin's foul blackness so seen as in the cross, and nowhere else is sin condemned and put away. Without the death of the cross, Jesus taught there could be no salvation; and it was to the cross alone that He directed Nicodemus for eternal life. The apostles preached

Christ crucified (1 Cor. 1:23);

and Paul said,

God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world (Gal. 6:14).

“The cross, its burthen — oh, how great!

No strength but His could bear its weight;

No love but His would undertake

To bear it for the sinner's sake.”

The testimony of Jesus Himself, the records of the Old and New Testaments, the witness of prophets and apostles, all concur in directing the serpent-bitten, sin-sick soul to the Lord Jesus who was crucified, and to Him alone, for everlasting life; and blessed indeed are those, who, by faith in Him, escape eternal death so fully deserved, and receive eternal life so wholly undeserved, but freely given.

He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him (John 3:36).

3. THE EFFECTS.

It came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived (Num. 21:9).

His despairing, languishing heart revived. As soon as he was conscious that he lived, the fear of death departed, and peace took possession of his mind. Health and vigor returned for service and conflict, he overcame the enemies of the Lord, and went onward to the promised land. But further; having proved how effectual simply beholding the serpent of brass was, he, doubtless, was anxious that others perishing around him should enjoy the same blessing.

Applying this instruction to ourselves, by the light of our Lord's exposition of it, it is clear that whoever believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was lifted up on the cross, has eternal life. He has a new life in him. He is a new creation. He is born again. It is a fact, that by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ we have life.

He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of

God hath not life (1 John 5:12).

It is not merely a change of views, but life — eternal life — that the believer in Christ receives.

The present possession of eternal life is connected with a remarkable change both in experience and action. Conversion is really a transition from death unto life. Those who had previously prided themselves on their good qualities, now see themselves to be vile and worthless; and that blessed Savior, whom they had so long despised and rejected, now becomes incomparably precious and lovely. That God, once so dreaded, is worshipped and adored as the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. His word and ways honored, and His people, once slighted if not persecuted,

are now beloved objects of interest and affection. These are some of the workings of Divine life in the soul. But all who have life have not peace; they have eternal life, but do not know it. Such a sense of their own evil hearts and ways presses upon them; they cannot suppose it possible that such vile persons can have eternal life; yet they look to Christ, and cannot give Him up; they little think that the self-humbling experience they have is the effect of their having life. There are many such now, and there were also in the apostles' days; hence John wrote,

These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life (1 John 5:13);

and he assured them that they might know that they had passed from death unto life, because they loved the brethren (1 John 3:14).

I have said that when the Israelite who had looked to the serpent of brass knew that he lived, fear of death left him, and peace took possession of his mind. So now, when the believer knows that he is pardoned, justified, and accepted, by simply looking to Christ in glory, who was crucified, peace flows into his heart. We have

joy and peace in believing (Rom. 15:13);

being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our

Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1).

Fear of death is removed when the soul looks only and simply to the Lord Jesus, and believes that He has died in his stead, and suffered for his sins on the cross. The believer thus knows, that whatever changes may take place, his life is hid with Christ in God, and though he may sleep in Jesus, yet he shall never see death. This fills the languishing spirit with consolation and peace, as well as strength for the service of God, and running the heavenly race.

Oh the blessedness of having eternal life by simply looking to the Lord Jesus who was lifted up! Because we have life, we more or less act according to the mind of God. We learn our vileness in the flesh, and hide in Christ our righteousness; we know the flesh has been condemned and crucified, but know Christ is our life. We experience infirmity and weakness, but know that Christ is our strength. We grieve that we are sometimes the subjects of folly and error, but know that Christ is our wisdom. We are painfully sensible of sinning, but are assured that Christ is our Advocate with the Father. We are tempted by Satan to the unbelieving thought; "we shall one day perish"; but are comforted by that Promise of the Almighty Savior,

They shall never perish (John 10:28);

and when well-nigh overwhelmed by

fightings without and fears within (see 2 Cor. 7:5),

we rely on Him who is able to save to the uttermost all them that come unto God by Him. Thus Christ is all to the Christian: and though when looking at self he may cry,

O wretched man that I am! (Rom. 7:24)

when looking to the Savior who was crucified he can say,

The Lord is my light and my salvation (Psa. 27:1).

“So great, so vast a sacrifice,

May well my hope revive;

If God's own Son thus bleeds and dies,

The sinner sure must live.”

FELLOW CHRISTIANS! we have life — spiritual, eternal life; let us, then, walk and act in the Spirit. Let us show that we belong to Jesus, that we have died, as regards the flesh, in Him, and that we have life by and in a risen, glorified Savior. We must abide in Christ, live upon Christ, feed on Christ, draw from Christ, if we would walk like Christ. This new life must be nourished, the spiritual energies used, the new-born affections exercised, if we would be strong and flourishing as servants of Christ. We need not, could not, work for life, because we have life. We could not be Christians if we had not looked to the Son of man lifted up, and had life. The word of Christ informs and strengthens the new life; the flesh and blood of Christ nourish the new life; the way of faith is the acting out of the new life; the Lord's return from heaven is that for which the new life waits.

Seeing that we have eternal life by beholding the Lamb of God, let us seek to bring others to taste and enjoy the same blessings. Oh, how earnestly must the healed Israelite have ran far and near to bring his bitten friends to behold the serpent of brass! How quickly might he be seen throwing back the curtain of his neighbour's tent, that the dying, gasping ones might take one look and live! What a reality God's remedy was to them! And is it less so to us? Oh no, my brethren! let it then be our daily, fervent, untiring labour to present Christ to all around us.

But some of my readers cannot say that they have life. The Son of man has been lifted up to give life to sin-sick, dying souls, but they refuse to look and live. How sad is your portion! How awfully dark is your prospect! God's love is despised by you. His pity and compassion are not welcomed. His gospel is not received. The sufferings and death of the Lord Jesus are despised, and you are still in your sins, daily sinking under the serpent's bite, dying under its influence, and rapidly hastening to the bar of God's judgment, to receive your final sentence, and eternal doom. But it may be that some may say, “I know I am a sinner. I am sure I have broken God's laws. I have merited His displeasure. My heart trembles at death. I shudder at the thought of judgment. Can I be saved? Is there hope for me? Is there any possibility that I can have eternal life?” Yes! yes! dear soul; Jesus died for such as you. He was nailed to the cross for the ungodly. Every sin-convicted soul that looks to Him He saves.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved (Acts 16:31).

“A dying, risen Jesus,

Seen by the eye of faith,

At once from anguish frees us,

And saves the soul from death.

How gracious this Physician!

His grace He'll freely give;
He makes no hard condition,
'Tis only look and live."

Faith's Choice

As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love (S of S 2:3, 4).

The world may be compared to a forest containing a great variety of trees; and the speaker here boasts of the superiority of the tree he has made choice of over all other trees of the wood. He finds that the apple tree (or rather the citron tree) meets all his necessities; and not only affords him shelter and safety, but yields sweet and refreshing fruit. No tree, not even the lofty pine, or the majestic cedar, so suits him as the citron tree; for there not only is he sheltered from the sun's burning rays, but his hunger and thirst are fully satisfied.

Man naturally craves something. He thirsts for what he has not, and has an aching void in his heart, which he vainly seeks to satisfy. As the powers of intellect become developed, and tastes and inclinations formed, so people may be seen selecting objects to interest their minds and meet their wishes. But turn where they may, and have what they may, their experience is that all under the sun is vanity and vexation of spirit. Still, if one object brings its sorrowful disappointment, they pursue another, and it is to be feared that many fritter away life with no better experience than running from one thing to another in this evil world, seeking rest, and finding none.

Some persons most diligently addict themselves to a money- making system. Money is their heart's object. Gold is their god. Every thing with them is valueless, except it increase their wealth. Oh, how many in this forest-like world have selected for themselves a tree which may be called money! They strive for rest, but never obtain it. They are said to be rich, but they often feel very poor. Others may think them satisfied, but they know nothing of true contentment. They often painfully exemplify that

the love of money is the root of all evil (1 Tim. 6:10);

and prove the truth of the inspired writer, that

he that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase (Eccl. 5:10).

There are others who do not care so much for money as for pleasure. They make everything bend to self-indulgence. They pity the covetous and miserly, while they squander their substance in revelry and mirth. They are devoted to the pleasures of sin, and know nothing higher than the gratification of the lust of the flesh, the lust of eyes, and the pride of life. Of all the trees of the wood, none suits them like the tree of pleasure. Their pursuits are various, according to their means and tastes; but ease and pleasure they will have if possible. They know nothing better than present indulgence.

Others may be found who care little either for wealth, or the fascinating pleasures of fashionable life. Their deportment is quiet and perhaps retiring, but their minds eagerly pursue science, as it is

called. Time, wealth, health, and everything else are easily sacrificed to this object. They find its present interest sufficiently encouraging to promote diligent perseverance, and its supposed harmlessness becomes an excuse for the most moral to engage in it to any extent. Science is their heart's choice. They know not that the Scripture classes the desires of the mind with the lusts of the flesh (Eph. 2:3), and, perhaps, seldom consider that when they die, their accumulated masses of philosophy die with them.

There is another class of persons who make fame their object. Ambitious of leaving a great name behind them, they are almost willing to accomplish it at the expense of self-sacrifice. As they become loaded with honors, so they judge their course prosperous; until at length the cold hand of death proves, to their eternal sorrow, that

man being in honour abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish (Psa. 49:12).

Such are some of the classes of character around us, and whether it be money, pleasure, science, or fame, they stand like so many trees in a large forest, and some make choice of one, and some of another. But there is a tree, once planted at Golgotha, differing from every other, because of the present comfort and eternal blessing it imparts to all who take refuge there. It is the cross of the Son of God, who was crucified for sinners, that is the object of the believer's choice. In vain does the awakened conscience find any other satisfying object. He knows that no amount of wealth can purchase peace; no earthly pleasure can relieve his heavy heart; no philosophical researches can ease him of his weight of guilt; no honor from men can secure to him the immortal honor of being a child of God. In Immanuel's cross, he reads that God is love. In the bleeding Savior, he beholds God providing a sin-cleansing fountain. On Calvary's tree, he sees sins judged and purged for every one that believeth. In the person of Jesus crucified, he finds infinite love, holiness, and truth. The more he knows of Jesus, the more he learns of His perfect hatred of sin, and boundless grace to sinners. His self-sacrificing devotedness, in life and in death, shows us how He pleased not Himself, but loved the Church, and gave Himself for it. The spotlessness of His person, the amazing love of His heart, the perfection of His work, the suitability of His offices, so fill the believer with joy and gladness, that he can truly exclaim,

As the citron tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons (S of S 2:3).

In our meditation on these verses, we shall find instruction concerning the believer's choice, his rest, his joy, his exercises, and his privileges. Let us consider each of these points separately.

1. THE BELIEVER'S CHOICE.

My beloved (S of S 2:3).

There is none like the Lord Jesus to the believer. He sees nothing so attractive and glorious. Christ is the object of his heart's affections. In Him he beholds the glory of God, the grace of God, the wisdom of God, and the power of God. He finds Him to be incomparably sweet. He esteems Christ as the chiefest among ten thousand, the altogether lovely. He has fled to Him for salvation, and found peace to his wounded soul through faith in His blood, so that he can truly say,

my beloved,

my Redeemer, my righteousness, and my life. Therefore, Christ is very dear to him. Among all the hosts of earth or heaven, he could point to Jesus and say,

This is my beloved, and this is my friend (S of S 5:16).

Personal attachment to Jesus is the feeling of every true believer —

Unto you therefore which believe He is precious (1 Pet. 2:7).

In whatever aspect Jesus is viewed, in every way, and in every office, He is the beloved of the believer's soul. He could part with everything rather than Christ. It is Christ Himself that the believer's heart is set upon, and his language is —

"Compared with Christ, in all beside

No comeliness I see;

My heart's desire, all-gracious Lord,

Is to be more like Thee.

"Loved of my Lord, for Him again

With love intense I burn;

Chosen of Thee ere time began,

I choose Thee in return.

"Less than Thyself will not suffice,

But Thou art ample store;

More than Thyself I cannot crave,

Nor canst Thou give me more."

2. THE BELIEVER'S REST.

I sat down (S of S 2:3).

Jesus only gives rest to the burdened soul, and this He does according to His own word —

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Matt. 11:28).

This the Christian realizes by faith, according to that Scripture,

We which have believed do enter into rest (Heb. 4:3).

The speaker here says,

I sat down under His shadow (S of S 2:3);

and so the Christian not only knows that Christ crucified is the way of salvation, but he avails himself of it, he comes to Him, he enters in, he sits down in peace, because God provides rest for his sin-burdened conscience. The awakened soul, having proved the insufficiency of human

expedients, finds in the cross of the Son of God every thing to remove his guilt, quiet his fears, and fill him with brightest hope. A Spirit-led sinner never loses the burden of his sins till he beholds Jesus crucified; for there, and there alone, he sees the holy God putting away sin to give him righteousness and peace, and presenting pardon to the guilty, life for the dead, and salvation for the lost. He comes, therefore, and finds rest. By faith he sits beneath the shadow of the cross, and finds himself for ever sheltered from the wrath of God, because Christ was made sin and a curse for him. He rests in the knowledge that God is his Savior, that his iniquities were laid upon Jesus, that the stroke of Divine vengeance fell upon Him; thus suffering for sins, the Just for the unjust, to bring him to God. In this way the believer realizes that God loves him, welcomes him, pardons, and justifies him from all things. Every question is answered, every fear removed, and love, gratitude, and hope take possession of his soul. Let none expect rest apart from a believing view of the value of the death of Christ; for —

“Here we rest, in wonder viewing

All our sins on Jesus laid;

And a full redemption flowing,

From the sacrifice He made.”

There are many anxious souls who have not rest. Why is it? Because they seek it not by faith; they have not sat down under the shadow of the Lord Jesus Christ. They may be taken up with doctrines, and lack rest. They may be diligent in observing ordinances, and lack rest. They may be much exercised about their frames, feelings, and experiences, and yet lack rest. It must be Christ and His finished work to give rest — Christ Himself — Christ only. If they look anywhere else, they are off the true ground of rest. As long as the eye is turned inward upon self — good self, bad self, or religious self, self in any form — they must lack rest, because Christ is the only Savior, the only shelter, the only object of faith, the only resting-place that God has provided for sinners. The Divine verdict has long ago gone forth as to man’s thoughts being only evil, and that continually, and his heart desperately wicked; in fact, that in him is no good. And when the soul takes this ground before God, and looks simply to His grace, that has met us in our ruin and helplessness in the death of Christ, it finds deliverance from slavish fear and guilt, and the fullest reason for confidence and rest. When we thus find rest, we begin to labour for Christ, and find that His yoke is easy, and His burden light.

3. THE BELIEVER’S JOY.

I sat down under His shadow with great delight (S of S 2:3).

Christ is our joy, as well as our rest; yea, we joy in God through Him. We are commanded to rejoice in the Lord always. The assurance of our being heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ makes us very happy. We can say with the apostle Peter,

Whom having not seen, we love; in whom though now we see Him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory (see 1 Pet. 1:8).

The new song is put into our mouth. The contemplation of the eternal blessings we have in Christ our Lord gives us great delight. We envy not the worldling’s mirth. We know that his joy is like the

crackling of thorns under a pot, which continues but for a moment, and then expires for ever; but joy in the Holy Ghost, which we have in Christ, is sometimes too deep, too pure, and too full of blessing to be uttered.

How is it that believers are not happier? Because the death of Christ is not more simply and habitually contemplated as the foundation of all joy and blessing. It may be said, that Jesus is not now on the cross, nor in the sepulcher; but that He is risen from the dead, and glorified at the right hand of the majesty on high. This is quite true, but it only magnifies the value of the cross. If Jesus entered into heaven by His own blood, and now appears there a Lamb as it had been slain, do we not see the honor God has put upon the cross in heaven? It is Jesus risen and glorified that reflects such eternal value on His death. If we would be happy, if we would be heavenly-minded, we must dwell much on the glorious worth and work of the Lamb as it had been slain. The contemplation of the Lord Jesus in the glory, and His finished work, with a believing regard to the testimony of the Holy Ghost in the written word concerning that work, fill the soul with joy and peace; for the word of Christ and the work are both needed for true spiritual joy. We must sit under His shadow, if we would have great delight.

“A bleeding Savior seen by faith,

A sense of pardoning love,

A hope that triumphs over death,

Give joys like those above.”

4. THE BELIEVER'S EXERCISES.

His fruit was sweet to my taste (S of S 2:3).

The tree planted on Calvary is richly laden with sweetest fruit to the believing soul. There is nothing there to sour the spirit; but all is love, and peace, and blessing. All other springs are dry, but here there is continual refreshment. It needs but the hand of faith to pluck and eat the sweet fruit of the tree of life. Looking up to the Lord in the glory, we taste His goodness, and delight our souls in Him. Everything else has more or less of bitterness, but here we find nothing but sweetness. Here we feed on that grace which tells us of pardon, peace, acceptance, righteousness, sonship, and fellowship with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. Here we see that we are blessed with all spiritual blessings. Here the fountain of living water is ever freely flowing; and we find that all the promises of God are made sure to us; for they are all yea and amen in Christ, unto the glory of God by us. Here the weary obtain renewal of strength, the disordered spirit finds healing, the mourner is comforted, faith becomes increased, and unbelief put to shame; the weak are strengthened, the erring are restored, the poor in spirit are enriched, the hungry are fed, and the thirsty refreshed. Oh, how blessed it is to sit beneath the outstretched arms of the Lamb as it had been slain, and, in the lively exercise of faith, eat of the precious fruit of His agony and death! All our exercises are profitable, if they lead us to Him; all our necessities are good, if they are only the occasions of our realizing our blessings in Christ, and of quickening our appetites to feeding on Him. There is all the difference between seeking satisfaction in the fruit of the Spirit in us, and feeding on Christ for us. The former engenders pride and bondage, the latter keeps us happy and fruitful.

5. THE BELIEVER'S PRIVILEGES.

He brought me to the banqueting house, and His banner over me was love (S of S 2:4).

We are made nigh to God in Christ Jesus and by His blood, and our security is in the everlasting, unchangeable love of God. So exceedingly rich is the grace of God, that we cannot have one of the blessings of redemption without having all. So perfect in every way is the atoning work, that we are called unto the fellowship of the risen and glorified Son of God —

raised up together, and made sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (see Eph. 2:6).

It is done —

He brought me to the banqueting house.

Hence we have liberty to draw near to God, to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus. When Christ died on the cross, we are told that the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; thus showing us that every impediment to man's drawing near was removed, and that, through Christ's sacrifice, we may come with boldness to the throne of grace. The returned prodigal not only received the kiss of reconciliation, the best robe, the ring, shoes, &c.; but he was at once invited to feast at the father's table over the fatted calf, as having all the privileges of sonship —

let us eat and be merry (Luke 15:23).

So the Christian is not only reconciled, justified, and blessed, but is at once brought to the Father's bosom, loved with the same love as the Father hath loved Christ; for Jesus died to bring us to God. He undertook to raise us up at the last day, to present His Church without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. He is our life; He hath quickened us, given us the Spirit of adoption, and His blood gives us a sure title to glory; hence, through Him, we have access by the Spirit unto the Father. We are brought to the banqueting house, and His banner over us is love.

This is the ground of true worship. We no longer know Jerusalem, or any other place, where men ought to worship; for

God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24).

Where Jesus is, in the heavenlies, is the banqueting house — the house of bread and wine; the blood of Jesus is the way, the Spirit is the power, a believing and true heart the necessary state, the holiest of all the place. This is worship.

Here it is also that we learn the ways and mind of God. By the teaching of His Spirit, through the written word, our minds become stored with His thoughts, our hearts filled with His love; so that we think as He thinks, hate what He hates, love what He loves; according to our measure walk as Jesus walked, speak His words, &c. This is fellowship; this is the communion of the Holy Spirit.

Here we find the Lamb as it had been slain, ever reminding us of an already accomplished redemption, and of our perfect acceptance in Him. No obedience of ours could effect this; no legal service or carnal ordinances could possibly bring us into such nearness and blessing; but we are brought to the house of bread and wine by the blood of the Lamb. There we feast our souls. There

we drink the cup of blessing. There we realize that His flesh is meat indeed, and His blood is drink indeed. There the various attributes of the God of love and peace shine forth in the slain Lamb with unfading beauty and eternal brightness. The joy of that banqueting house is that the dead son is alive again, and the lost found; the Shepherd's joy is, that He has found the sheep which was lost; and we rejoice that we are delivered from the swine- trough of sin and misery, and welcomed to feasting and joy in the Father's house. Happy would it be if we all more fully enjoyed the blessed privileges into which the grace of God has brought us.

Dear reader, have you seen beauty in Jesus? Has the death of Christ a claim on your heart above everything else? Are you seeking wealth, pleasure, science, fame? or are you so convinced of the unsatisfying character of all other things that you seek Jesus for present and eternal rest and peace? Do think of these things. You may perhaps say, I seek money, pleasure, science, fame, and Christ too; but let me tell you, that you cannot have this. You cannot serve God and mammon. You cannot be a friend of the world without being the enemy of God. You cannot love sin and love Christ too. You cannot please yourself and please God also. You cannot be an infidel and a believer at the same time. Let Me beseech you to discontinue the attempt to reconcile such impossibilities; let me entreat you to behold the love of God set forth so fully in the death of His beloved Son. Oh, look at that tree on which Jesus bare our sins in His own body! There tarry till your hard heart is melted, till your icy affections are dissolved, till your unbelieving soul is overcome with such amazing love. Then you will love Jesus, delight in His ways and service, and the sincere language of your heart will be,

As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and His banner over me was love (S of S 2:3, 4).

May God graciously apply His own truth, by His Spirit, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Salvation; or, the Philippian Jailor

What must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house (Acts 16:30, 31).

I desire to address myself especially to the unsaved. Many will read these pages who are not converted. Some know they are unsaved; their daily pursuits show it: they are conscious that they have not yet tasted the joys of redeeming love: others despise and discard the subject altogether. There was a time when every Christian in the world was unconverted; for

we all . . . were by nature children of wrath, even as others (Eph. 2:3).

What an awful condition it is to be unsaved! and yet how many are careless about it! The jailor at Philippi was unsaved; but when he felt the reality of the state he was in, he cried out for salvation, and found it, to the joy and rejoicing of his heart. One thing is certain, that all who would enjoy the blessings of salvation must have eternal life; for Jesus said,

Ye must be born again (John 3:7).

This is very plain and decisive.

Many persons are really ignorant of the terrible danger they are in; they see not the precipice on which they stand; they perceive not the brittle thread by which they are suspended; they know not that they live on the very threshold of eternity; they feel not that they are distant from God, rebellious against God, guilty before God; therefore they cannot be anxious about salvation. They may think of outward propriety before men, of religious forms, ordinances, and the like; but they are not concerned about salvation from the wrath to come. The Bible, however, speaks to us of salvation. The grace of God brings. salvation. The gospel is a message from God to men about salvation. Jesus Himself preached salvation. He said to a weeping woman at His feet,

Thy faith hath saved thee (Luke 7:50);

and to a repentant publican,

Salvation is come to this house (see Luke 19:9)

Paul exultingly exclaimed,

I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth (Rom. 1:16).

Those who received the gospel in apostolic times felt that they were saved; they realized a present salvation; they regarded themselves and their fellow-believers as saved; hence we are told that

the Lord added to the Church . . . such as should be saved (Acts 2:47)

— saved ones. Paul addressed the Corinthians, saying

but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified (1 Cor. 6:11);

and that the preaching of the cross

unto us which are saved it is the power of God (1 Cor. 1:18);

and writing to Timothy, he said,

Who hath saved us, &c. (2 Tim. 1:9).

And so, also, the Old Testament taught; for the Israelite in Egypt, whose lintel and door-posts were sprinkled with the blood of the lamb, was safe. When God's angry judgments were all around, he was perfectly safe, because of the sprinkled blood; he might feast on the roasted lamb, and rejoice, because he was sheltered by the blood. The fleeing man-slayer was saved the moment he entered the city of refuge. The avenger might seek to alarm him, but he was safe, because he was inside the city. Noah was safe as soon as he entered the ark, for God shut him in; though afterwards he was in the midst of destroying vengeance. Rahab the harlot, whose house was on the wall of the city which fell down flat, was safe; for the scarlet line was in the window. All these persons, I say, were safe — their security was unquestionable. Whatever judgments happened to others, they were taught that they were perfectly safe. They so understood the matter, and the result confirmed it. And so now; God so values the death of the unblemished Victim — the one perfect offering of His well-beloved Son — that He pronounces a full, free, present, and eternal salvation to every sinner that believes; perfect safety, come what may, because he has redemption in Christ Jesus and through His blood.

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1).

"Happy Christian, God's own child,

Called, chosen, reconciled:

Once a rebel, far from God,

Now brought nigh through Jesu's blood."

In considering these verses, I shall notice —

1. The jailor's awakening;
2. The gospel preached to him;
3. Its effects.

1. THE AWAKENING. With regard to the Philippian jailor, we know but little of his former history. From the few materials we have, we may gather that he was diligent in his calling, and that he took no more interest in the apostles of the Lord Jesus than in the worshipers of the great goddess Diana. It is very likely that he had heard something of Paul's ways, if he had not of the conversion and baptism of Lydia and others. He knew also why Paul and Silas were imprisoned; and appears not only to have acquiesced in the propriety of punishing and restraining such men, but also of preventing, as far as possible, a recurrence of their preaching. They were brought to the prison, with a charge that the jailor would

keep them safely (Acts 16:23);

but that we might know that they had then no favour in the jailor's eyes, we are told that he thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks (Acts 16:24).

This is enough to show us the condition of his heart. He knew not, felt not, God's love; therefore his heart was destitute of that love to the brethren which always marks those who are born of God. He had very probably heard Paul and Silas praying and singing praises unto God at midnight; for we are told that the prisoners heard them. But none of these things seem to have moved the jailor. Like a thorough man of the world, he appears to have retired to bed that night with as much unconcern as on any other occasion. All that he heard and saw of the servants of the Lord Jesus were insufficient to awaken his dark mind, and arouse his conscience. But God had a purpose of blessing in store for him. God's eye was upon him for good. God's good pleasure was to glorify His own name, in making the wrath of man to praise Him, and hiding pride from man. The holy, godly testimony of faithful ministers had not impressed his heart, therefore other means must be used to alarm his benighted soul. That jailor who had so cruelly thrust them into the dungeon, and chained them to the stocks, must yet be brought to fall down before them, and acknowledge them as the servants of the Most High; and Paul and Silas, who appeared to be interrupted in the faithful discharge of their gospel ministry, were also to prove that, like their Master, each step of cruelty and oppression turned out for the furtherance of God's purposes of grace, and only led them forward in the path of true service, and not out of it. Their midnight prayer and praise, too, seem to indicate that they were in the lively attitude of faith, and in full expectation of the blessing of the Lord.

But there is something very solemn in this period of the jailor's history; for it seems to tell us, that if men reject the quiet, holy testimony of the servants of Christ, God has other means of bringing down man's lofty looks. God's power is unlimited, both in mercy and judgment. In this case it was to be made bare in grace. He who smote Saul with blindness, and brought him to the Savior's feet, could also bring the jailor there. That all-powerful arm might justly have been lifted up with the sword of vengeance, and, piercing the heart of that man who had dared to chain the feet of His dear servants, have at once hurled him to the pit of eternal destruction; but mercy rejoiced against judgment. In the darkness and stillness of the night, without any warning whatever, a tremendous convulsion threatened to rase the whole building to the ground, and to bury every inmate in its ruins. We are told that

suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: . . . and every one's bands were loosed (Acts 16:26).

This was God's way of showing that He is greater than man. This was Mercy's way of bringing salvation to that house, and of honoring the Lord's faithful, suffering servants. This was the very weapon that would arouse the hard and unfeeling jailor. He awoke out of sleep; his conscience owned it as God's dispensation. His first feeling was despair and self-destruction. When he saw the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had all fled, he drew his sword, and would have killed himself. His heart sank, terror filled his mind; his imagination drew the most hopeless conclusion, and Satan's last effort with him was the foul suggestion, "Kill thyself." A loud voice, however, suddenly altered his judgment, and produced an instantaneous revolution in his mind.

Are not all the prisoners gone? No.

Paul cried with a loud voice, Do thyself no harm; for we are all here (Acts 16:28).

This was the sweet and heavenly way that Paul took with his jailor. It was returning good for evil, and kindness to one who had treated him so cruelly. But more than this. His conscience is awakened, a crowd of solemn thoughts press upon his mind. The convulsion of an earthquake might have consigned him at once to a dark eternity; another shock and he may be called to give an account of himself to God. He is assured that Paul and Silas have that peace and joy to which he is a stranger, and that they are the servants of God. He feels now that he is an unsaved man; that if he die, he must go where hope and mercy never can come. His case is urgent, his danger imminent, his position most perilous; for he now knows that he had been sleeping on the edge of a fearful precipice. Not a moment then can be lost. A light! a light! he cried. His very joints are loose, and every fiber of his body seems to quiver. Salvation, salvation is the longing of his whole soul. He springs at once into the inner prison, and falling down before these servants of the Lord Jesus, cries out,

Sirs, what must I do to be saved?(Acts 16:30)

Here I would pause, and kindly ask the reader, what profit has the sweet voice of God's redeeming love been to you? You read of Jesus in this book; you have often seen His servants, and heard them testify of forgiveness of sins through His blood; but has it aroused you? Will you, by your indifference, compel God to visit you with some painful affliction, some distressing dispensation, before you consider your state before Him? Must He snatch away from your eyes the dearest object of your life? Must He lay you prostrate on a bed of languishing? Must He make the earth to tremble, before you turn to Him for salvation?

It seems to me that these bitter ways are sometimes necessary, to alarm and incline men's hearts to come to Jesus. Oh, my reader! do consider how matters stand between you and God, and turn to Him at once for the salvation of your soul, lest, instead of an earthquake being sent to alarm your conscience and bring you to the Savior, a messenger be dispatched in judgment to hurl you into an eternity of blackness and despair!

2. THE GOSPEL PREACHED. It was salvation that occupied the jailor's whole soul, nothing less than salvation; not religious ceremonies, but salvation. What must I do to be saved? This, too, is the anxious enquiry of every truly enlightened soul; and we need not go to commentators or learned doctors for a correct answer to the question; for the Scriptures plainly tell us. The apostolic reply was,

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved (Acts 16:31).

This was the gospel that Paul and Silas preached, and it was an echo of their Master's voice; for when He was asked the question,

What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent (John 6:28, 29).

The gospel then preached to this awakened sinner of the Gentiles was salvation by faith. The jailor's thought, like many others, was that salvation was by works; what must I do? But Paul and

Silas assured him that he could be saved only in the way of faith. They presented the Lord Jesus Christ to him as the object of faith, and His finished work, and God's acceptance of it, as the ground of salvation, and warrant for perfect peace —

thou shalt be saved.

This is very simple, and commends itself to the confidence of an anxious enquirer. The gospel really excludes all idea of creature- doing for salvation, because it testifies that Jesus, the Son of God, hath so completely finished the work of our redemption, so thoroughly purged our sins, that He sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high, the rightful Lord of heaven and earth, and that all who believe on Him have at once an eternal interest in that blessed work. The Lord Jesus having magnified the law by bearing its curse, put away sin, abolished death, burst the bars of the grave, and triumphed over Satan, hell, and the grave, has entered into heaven itself with His own blood, having obtained eternal redemption for us; the resurrection and glorification of Christ being God's public testimony of His acceptance of the Savior's all- sufficient work. What is then to be done for salvation? Nothing; it is done already, and we have the warrant of God's word to receive and enjoy it by faith —

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved (Acts 16:31).

Faith reads the lessons of redeeming love in the death of the Son of God upon the cross; and those who can say,

We have known and believed the love that God hath to us (1 John 4:16)

have peace; they see that God's love has brought salvation to them, even when sinners, in the cross of His Son, and knowing He is now risen from the dead, they approach God with confidence; they know that He declares them saved by grace, through faith. What, I would ask, can exceed this boundless love? What else could have really met us in our low estate? What could so redound to the glory of God? And who so thoroughly reject the gospel, display self-ignorance, and despise the unsearchable riches of Divine love, as those who talk of doing for salvation?

Where is boasting?

said the apostle.

It is excluded. By what law? Of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law (Rom. 3:27, 28).

Blessed gospel for a sin-convicted, heavy-laden sinner!

3. THE EFFECTS. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation, and when received into the heart it brings forth fruit. It is God's means of begetting new creatures.

Of His own will,

says James,

begat He us with the word of truth (James 1:18).

It also gives liberty and peace —

the truth shall make you free (John 8:32).

All this we should expect, when a sinner is brought to know that he is saved. Who so grateful, so dutiful, so happy, so free! Some hear the truth of the gospel, and the only apparent effect is, that it hardens them. This was not the case with Lydia, for her heart was opened, that she attended to the word ministered by Paul; and so the jailor, for his whole soul was filled with anxiety; he, therefore, received the truth at once in the love of it, and its effects were most manifest. What could be so sweet to such an one as the story of the Savior's love! With what intense interest the trembling jailor must have listened to those servants of the Lord while declaring to him the way of salvation! and what grateful surprise must have filled his heart at hearing that the way, was so simple, so free, so full of blessing, and so suited to a lost, helpless sinner! It at once engaged his attention, and made him long to hear more about such glorious tidings; and soon all his household were brought together, though at midnight, and were attentive listeners to Paul and Silas, while they further opened up to them the riches of Divine grace. The energetic, determined jailor, who only a few hours before had so rudely thrust them into the inner prison, regardless of their lacerated backs, now sat like a little child as an anxious enquirer at their feet, and gathered others to partake also of the blessings of the gospel —

They spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house (Acts 16:32).

Among the first effects, then, of the jailor's reception of the gospel of Christ, we may notice his love for the truth, a child-like enquiring mind, and concern for the spiritual welfare of others. The good news of salvation by Christ had been so applied to his conscience by the Holy Spirit, that it came to him as cold water to a thirsty soul, and he was immediately like a dead man raised to life. He was born again of the incorruptible seed of the word, he was a new creation, old things had passed away, and all things were become new; he therefore had an ear to hear, a mind to understand, a heart to receive and love, and desire more and more, the sincere milk of the word, and such a sense of its value, that he wished others to receive the same blessed gospel.

The next thing we may notice among the fruits of faith, is his love to the Lord's servants. He is begotten by the word of truth, and is thoroughly changed in his ways; he has passed from death unto life, therefore he loves the brethren. A few hours before, he saw nothing more in Paul and Silas to call forth affection and sympathy than in the other prisoners; but now he views every thing with new eyes. Having received the word of truth, the gospel of the grace of God, he loves not only Him that begat, but them also that are begotten of Him; hence we are told that

he took Paul and Silas the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; . . . and . . . brought them into his house, he set meat before them (see Acts 16:33, 34).

This was blessed. This was a fine example of the fruit of the Spirit, and it proved the sincerity of his profession; for it was not love in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth. Love is a vital point. Religious profession, without a loving heart toward Christ and His members, is like a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. The apostle John declares, that whatever any man may profess,

he that loveth not his brother abideth in death (1 John 3:14).

But in the jailor's case the entrance of God's word had given light; it had given understanding to the simple; it had by the Spirit quickened him when dead in sins. He thus had Divine life; therefore

there was Divine love, fruit in season, self-denial for the sake of Christ's servants.

But more than this, he carried out the mind of the Lord —

he was baptized (see Acts 16:33).

This Paul and Silas had doubtless set before him, and it came with authority to his conscience, because the love of Christ constrained him. His heart was full. His whole soul was influenced with the atoning death of Christ, and the power of His resurrection. He knew that he was saved by the Lord Jesus Christ, that he had redemption in Christ through His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace; it was therefore not arduous, but a sweet privilege to attend to an ordinance in which he would realize so personally what it was to be buried with Christ. Faith does not argue; it simply believes and acts on God's word. Nor was the jailor alone in this; the whole congregation, even all his household who had heard the preaching, had no doubt received the gospel too, were happy in the Savior's love, and were also baptized. (See Acts 16:33.) Hence we see that there was not merely a confession of faith; but the obedience of faith; not only an attentive ear to listen to the word of the Lord, but grateful response in doing the will of the Lord.

And yet further. There was not only love and peace now animating the jailor's soul, there was joy also —

He rejoiced, believing in God with all his house (see Acts 16:34).

This seems to complete the picture. There was now nothing wanting to show forth the true workmanship of the Spirit in this new-born soul. It was indeed bringing forth good fruit. He could clearly see that there was only a short space of time between him and pleasures for evermore, so that he could rejoice in hope of the glory of God. He could look for the Lord's coming with unhesitating confidence, because he believed that all his sins had been atoned for, all his debt had been cancelled; and now being united by the Holy Ghost to Him who is Lord of heaven and earth, and seated in Him in the heavenlies, he could survey the future with a hope and confidence blooming with immortality and glory. We are told that he was

believing in God (Acts 16:34);

how could he then fail to rejoice? for

"Who have such reason to be glad

As those redeemed to God?"

Thus we have traced, in the narrative of the Philippian jailor, the various workings of the Holy Spirit in awakening one dead in trespasses and sins, giving peace through the gospel of Christ, and its blessed power in giving life and salvation, and bringing forth fruit to God. But the thought crosses my mind that perhaps my reader is unconverted, still dead in sins, still seeking ease and satisfaction apart from God and Christ. Is it so? Is it possible that you are going on to eternal ruin without desiring salvation, without once anxiously crying out,

What must I do to be saved? (Acts 16:30).

Is it true that you hear of salvation by Christ, and heed it not? that you know there is a fountain open for sin and all uncleanness in the Savior's blood, and wash not? that the glorious sound,

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved (Acts 16:31),

rings in your ears, and you put it far from you? Oh, my friend! beware, lest the Savior have to say to you as to them of old,

Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life (John 5:40);

and

How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! (Matt. 23:37).

DEAR READER! ponder the Lord's awful words, YE WOULD NOT!

"Ye sinners, seek His grace,

Whose wrath ye cannot bear;

Fly to the shelter of His cross,

And find SALVATION there."

Iniquity Taken Away, and Sin Purged

Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips: and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me (Isa. 6:5-8).

It is very blessed to trace, in the Old Testament Scriptures, the gracious way in which God has ever been ready to meet man as a sinner, and to contemplate that way which has always been through the sacrificial work of His beloved Son. When our first parents had garments presented to them to cover their nakedness, they were formed of coats of skins, to show us that blessing could only flow from God to man through sacrifice. When Abel obtained witness that he was righteous, it was because of the excellency of the sacrifice which he offered. The whole ritual of the last dispensation teaches us that God can only be approached by man through the sacrifice of a life. Hence it is that there is so much in the ancient Scriptures about dealing with God through the death of the sacrifice; all intended to show forth that in due time God would provide an all-sufficient sacrifice for man as a sinner. But it is here that people so mistake; and Christ crucified is to many still a stumbling-stone and rock of offence. Man's thought in general, if he think of God at all, is about his sacrificing for God; thus vainly hoping to appease God, and procure rest for his conscience by some works of self-denial; but God meets such a false thought at once by saying,

I will have mercy, and not sacrifice (Matt. 9:13, 12:7).

This entails the most perfect self-sacrifice, because it lays on man the absolute necessity of setting self aside entirely, to confess the utter unworthiness of all self-righteousness, as well as of self altogether, and to rest only in Divine mercy, and on that sacrifice which God has so graciously provided. This has always been the teaching of God; and the same prophet, whose experience in the Lord's presence we are about to contemplate, afterwards published the solemn declaration, that

all flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever (Isa. 40:6-8).

Thus we find that the Spirit of God in olden time taught men that they were sinners, and that their most goodly things were perishing and passing away; and gave them the unalterable word of the Lord, as an immoveable rock for their souls to stay upon. And so it is now.

The chapter before us begins very abruptly. It tells us that the prophet had this vision of glory in the year that king Uzziah died (Isa. 6:1).

But why is Uzziah thus introduced? May it not be, among other things, to remind us that the very best man on earth, the highest potentate of Judah's kingdom, the most honored man in the world, stands in widest contrast with THE KING, THE LORD OF HOSTS?

King Uzziah was a leper, and dwelt outside the camp; which shows us that sinful man, however high in office and dignity, is unfit for the presence of God; that man has no resources at all for cleansing the leprosy of sin, and that except God undertake to meet him with healing mercy, he must still remain unclean, and unfit for association with the God of holiness. Hence, on referring to the king's history, as recorded in 2 Chron. 26:21, we are told, that Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house, being a leper; for he was cut off from the house of the Lord.

Thus we find, on the very threshold of our subject, the humbling intimation of man's real character of uncleanness and distance from God, though he stand in the highest position of society, and hold the most exalted office, and that even among the most highly favored people on earth.

In considering this very instructive portion of the Holy Scripture, we shall notice:

1. The prophet's vision of glory.
2. The effect of it upon himself.
3. The assurance of forgiveness he obtained.
4. His willing obedience.

1. THE PROPHET'S VISION OF GLORY.

I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple (Isa. 6:1).

There, in spirit, before God, the prophet took his place. There he saw the seraphims, the servants of the most High God, His ministers that do His pleasure. He beheld them taking the place of profoundest reverence, covering their faces with two of their wings. He saw also that each of them covered his feet, to show that, while they had always walked obediently, they did not glory in their service, but with greatest humility gloried only in the Lord. He saw them also with outstretched wings, to signify their delight in doing God's will, and that they held themselves in readiness to fly swiftly at His bidding. He heard also the words uttered before the throne; he listened to the converse of creatures there, and found it was

Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts (Isa. 6:3);

and

at the voice of him that cried, the posts of the door moved, and the house was filled with smoke (see Isa. 6:4).

These things the prophet saw and heard. It was indeed an infinitely holy place. No unclean word was heard there; nothing impure escaped the lips of any; no irreverent action was seen; no presumptuous ways, no angry passions, no foolish actions, no indolent habits, no self-willed manners, were beheld there; for God is holy, and nothing unclean can abide His presence. The

prophet was in the light, for God is light. He was beside the balance of the sanctuary, and all was love, and holiness, and truth.

2. THE EFFECT OF THE VISION. Deeply serious and personal reflections occupied the prophet's mind. Man never rightly learns what he is, except in God's presence. It is a well-known fact among men, that if we would understand the true qualities of anything, we must bring it to the light. So it is as regards things spiritual. We may compare ourselves with our fellow-men, and arrive at most erroneous conclusions; thus, the temperate man, measuring himself with a drunkard, believes himself righteous: and the chaste flatter themselves with thoughts of superiority over the licentious; while all may be equally guilty of covetousness, and other uncleanness, in the sight of God. It is therefore not wise to compare ourselves with our neighbours, but, coming into the light of God's holy presence, we shall be truly made manifest. When Isaiah considered the peace, love, humility, holiness, purity, and truth that characterized all those who dwelt in Jehovah's glorious presence, what could the prophet's reflections be? How could he fail to ask himself such questions as, "Am I truly humble before God? Do I serve Him with reverence? Do I delight to do the will of God? Has my conversation been holiness to the Lord?" Surely the prophet felt the light of God's presence to be a heart-searching region! It was enough to show him that he was "unclean! unclean!" that he had come short of God's standard. It was enough to make him feel that he stood "justly condemned" before God, and righteously exposed to His judgment and wrath. Hence he cried out, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips (Isa. 6:5).

Now notice here, dear friends, that the prophet's intense distress was concerning himself:

Woe is ME! for I am undone; because I am unclean, &c.

He did not say, Woe are we! we are undone. No; true Christianity is a personal thing —

The heart knoweth his own bitterness (Prov. 14:10).

Many a sentimental professor in our day may be found ready to say, We are all sinners; we are not what we should be. Such talk about our Savior, our religion, our society, &c., thus casting themselves in with others in a lump. But this will not do for God. This is not as the Spirit teaches. He convinces each one of his own sin. He so makes the conscience sensible of its guilt as to cause it to cry out, What must I do to be saved?

God be merciful to ME a sinner (Luke 18:13).

If I may but touch His garment, I shall be whole (Matt. 9:21).

Woe is ME! for I am undone.

But more than this, he felt he was unclean before God — a man of unclean lips. Those lips which ought to be, like the seraphim's, consecrated to His praises, had given utterance to the unclean thoughts and feelings of the heart; for

out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh (Matt. 12:34).

Like another Job, he could say,

I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor MYSELF, and repent in dust and ashes (Job 42:5, 6).

The light of God's holy presence made his uncleanness manifest; he felt its depths so great, its blackness so foul, its wounds so incurable, that he condemned himself as undone — hopelessly and helplessly unclean before God; ungodly, unholy, without strength, without any hope of recovery in himself. Having thus learnt himself in God's presence, he was then able to discern that the people by whom he was surrounded were unclean also.

Such were the lessons that the prophet was effectually taught in God's presence. And so, in measure, all learn now who are under Divine teaching; for though we may not be favoured with such a vision of glory as the prophet had, yet the Holy Spirit makes us feel that we have to do with God, and that every creature is manifest in His sight. Moreover, when we now think of the presence of God, we see by faith the risen, ascended, and glorified Man, Christ Jesus. We see there, besides the holy seraphims, one who was a Man of Sorrows in this world of sin, one who was exposed to Satan's temptations, man's deceivings, and the world's unholiness; but He always did the will of Him that sent Him, and finished His work; yea, He delighted in it, however much suffering it entailed. He never uttered an unclean word, or cherished an unholy thought, but from first to last yielded an unblemished life of holy obedience, sealing it with His own blood. When our thoughts thus center around Him, a Lamb as it had been slain, now in the midst of the throne of heaven, we are bound to exclaim, that

all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way (Isa. 53:6)!

and that all our best works are unclean before God. How is it that people are not sensible of their guilt? Because they do not fear God; they do not consider what they are in God's sight; they do not come into His holy presence, and weigh in the balance of truth. When men begin to fear God, they consider that it is to Him they are responsible, as His creatures; that to Him they must give account; that He is the Judge of all; and that the holiness of heaven is the only true standard. Then they feel that they are sinners, rebels, unworthy, and have justly merited banishment from His glorious presence. Then they are awakened to their real danger; they become deeply anxious about their eternal state; and feeling despair in self, they come to the throne of God, exclaiming,

Woe is me! for I am undone.

In this way only are we taught by the Spirit that we are lost and undone. Men may know that they are sinners by comparing themselves with others: thus the thief knows that he is a sinner, because he is surrounded by many who are honest; the unjust knows that he is a sinner, because he is acquainted with some who are upright, &c. In this way only can we account for so many persons who evince no soul-distress being so ready to say, "I know I am a sinner." But when we are brought to think of ourselves as in God's holy presence, then, whatever have been our previous conceptions of our fancied goodness, we are made to feel guilty before God, and exposed to His coming judgment and wrath. Then, I say, our cry is,

Woe is me! for I am undone.

3. Now let us consider THE ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS THE PROPHET OBTAINED. God in Christ is a blessed refuge for a sin- troubled soul; for He will be merciful to our unrighteousness,

as was beautifully expressed by Elihu to Job:

God looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not; He will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light (see Job 33:27, 28).

He will say,

Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom (Job 33:24)!

This seems to be the rule of the throne of grace, and was just what the prophet experienced; for while he stood thus consciously before the King, the Lord of Hosts, in a repentant mind, confessing his uncleanness, groaning over his sin, condemning himself, acknowledging his undone state, we are immediately told,

Then (mark, then!) flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged (Isa. 6:6, 7).

This is very blessed. It shows us that God waiteth to be gracious. It is a striking instance of the mercy of God to sinful man, and manifests His readiness to pardon and accept those who take a right place before Him. The prophet had an unmistakable warrant for the fullest assurance of his sins being put away, and of standing in the favour and blessing of God.

This assurance was based on two things — the application of the live coal from off the altar, and the word of the Lord. By the altar we are to understand a place where the sacrifice was burnt and presented to God. The cross of Christ is the only altar of New Testament days, and the various altars of the Old Testament were only types of it; and the coals of fire which consumed the sacrifices, and caused their savour to ascend to God, were figurative of that condemnation of sin which fell on Jesus, when He was made sin and a curse for us upon the cross of Calvary. The application, therefore, of the

live coal (Isa. 6:6)

to the prophet's

unclean lips (Isa. 6:7)

teaches us that God has, in His grace, provided an all-cleansing remedy for sin; that that remedy is found only in the sufferings, blood-shedding, and death of the Son of God; and that the moment the sin-burdened conscience realizes the virtue of that blood, the soul is at once at peace with God. It is the blood of Christ which maketh atonement. It is the blood of Christ which has made peace between the sinner and God. It is

in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:13)

and

through His blood (Eph. 1:7)

that the far-off sinner is brought nigh to God. It is the blood of Christ alone which cleanseth from all sin. It is only by the blood of Christ that any person has peace and confidence in God's presence.

The prophet knew that his uncleanness was purged by the application of the live coal from off the altar; and the sinner that believes in Christ Jesus for salvation knows also that he has peace through the blood of the cross. But the prophet had also the word of the Lord to assure him of his pardon and acceptance; and, blessed be God, so have we. Some will try to persuade us that no one can know his sins forgiven till after death, and therefore it is great presumption for any one to say so. But I reply, Who says I am forgiven? God says so; and if God says,

Thy sins are forgiven thee (Luke 5:20),

why need I fear, even if the whole world says it is not so? He tells us that Christ hath put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, and that my sins are forgiven, if I believe on the Lord Jesus; for

to Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins (Acts 10:43).

Let God then be true; for He who said to the prophet,

Thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged (Isa. 6:7),

says also now to me, and to all that believe on the Lord Jesus,

Be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee (Matt. 9:2).

We wait not for dreams, or visions, or some miraculous actings upon the senses; but we rest on the precious blood of Christ, and are assured by the unalterable word of the Lord that our sins are forgiven.

"Oh, how sweet to see the flowing

Of His soul-redeeming blood!

With Divine assurance knowing

That it made my peace with God."

But there are some who, though they do not deny the present knowledge of forgiveness of sins, yet often hesitate to confess that they are saved. They forget that the object of Christ's incarnation and death was to SAVE, that He came to SAVE the lost — not to help, but to save — every one that believeth on Him. Hence He told the weeping woman at His feet,

Thy faith hath SAVED thee (Luke 7:50)!

And when Zacchæus received Him joyfully, Jesus said,

This day is SALVATION come to this house (Luke 19:9).

The work of Christ saves, and the word of Christ says, You are saved by faith!

"But shall I after all be in glory?" exclaim some of the uninstructed and feeble-minded of the household of faith. "Though I now rest in Christ, and am at peace with God, may I not after all be

lost?" No, no, dear child of God; for the blood of Christ that speaks before the throne on my behalf now, will speak there for thee for ever; and Christ, who is thy righteousness now, will be thy righteousness for ever; and the Holy Spirit, who dwells in thee now, though grieved and quenched, will dwell in thee for ever; and Christ, who pleads for thee in heaven now, will continually intercede for thee. Jesus hath thee securely, and will never let thee go: none shall pluck thee out of His hand; for thus saith the word of the Lord,

He is able to save them to the uttermost (i.e. right on to the end) that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them (Heb. 7:25).

"The work which His goodness began,
The arm of His strength shall complete;
His promise is Yea and Amen,
And never was forfeited yet.
Things future, nor things that are now,
Nor all things below nor above,
Can make Him His purpose forego,
Or sever our souls from His love."

4. HIS WILLING OBEDIENCE. Some may say, You should preach Christian duty. So say I, only put it in its right place. Jesus said,

If ye love me, keep my commandments (John 14:15);
for He loves the
willing heart (Ex. 35:5),
and the
cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:7).

When we know peace with God, through the amazing sacrifice of His beloved Son, it constrains us to love and serve Him to whom we owe so much. And we see the prophet was much in this spirit; for after he had received an unmistakable assurance of pardon and peace with God, he had a willing, grateful desire to addict himself to the Lord's service. He says,

I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me (Isa. 6:8).

This surely is willing service, happy duty; it is like taking the yoke of Jesus, whose yoke is easy, and whose burden is light. The wondrous love of Christ constrains us to love Him, who has so loved us; it calls upon us to praise and glorify Him, who has washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Dear reader! let me affectionately ask if you have solemnly considered how matters stand between you and God? Does He now behold you as at peace with Him? Are you sure that God says of you, as He did of the prophet,

Thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin is purged (Isa. 6:7)?

This is the ground of peace with God — peace through the blood of Jesus — peace in the confidence that your sins were transferred to Jesus, and borne by Him, and that you are made the righteousness of God in Him.

Oh, my reader, if you feel the burden of your sins, and have not peace, come to Jesus at once, just as you are!

“Come, ye weary, heavy laden,

Lost and ruined in the fall!

If you tarry till you're better,

You will never come at all:

Not the righteous, SINNERS Jesus came to call!”

Strange Fire and the Fire From Heaven; or, Man's Thoughts and God's Thoughts of Christ

2 Chron. 7:1-10

Human thoughts concerning Christ and His sacrificial work are at the best poor. Man can think of the crucifixion as an historical fact, and write and speak of the nails that pierced His hands and feet, of the thorny crown, and other external circumstances connected with His death; and come to his own conclusion too as to the worth of that sacrifice. In fact, the gigantic Christendom round about us is built up mainly on man's miserable thoughts of Christ, and of things concerning Him. Like Nadab and Abihu, they have mingled strange fire with the incense which God commanded them not; and, like them, judgment and death must be the result. We are told that

they died before the Lord (Lev. 10:1-3);

and so must all those who are bringing the name of Christ and His work into use simply for present advantage and human exaltation; thus making ordinances and religious things their refuge, or relying upon the false foundation of associating man's opinions and his actions with the name of Christ, instead of relying only on Christ Himself and His infinitely efficacious work. Such is

strange fire (Lev. 10:1);

it is not according to God's mind; it does not give Him the glory. It is man's religiousness; and the end of these things is death.

It was not so, however, in Solomon's day, when he dedicated the house of the Lord. (See 2 Chron. 7:1-10.) We do not find

strange fire

offered; but

the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices (2 Chron. 7:1).

We see God here, and His acting in relation to the sacrifice. This is what the faith of a Spirit-taught, sin-convicted soul specially beholds in the cross of Christ. They are not ignorant of the external facts of the crucifixion; but until they see God acting in the scene, until they there see God dealing with His own Son as the sin-bearer, they find no real ground of peace and rest. In the cross of Christ faith sees the invisible God searching the victim, trying and estimating its worth by the fire of His uncompromising holiness, and condemning sin in the flesh. The cross of Calvary tells us of an unblemished One, who was in Himself infinitely acceptable to God, who fully glorified God in regard to our sins, and put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. It is God's estimate of the death of Christ, and nothing short of it, that establishes our souls in peace before Him. The resurrection, ascension, and glorification of Christ show us the infinite acceptability, the savour of

rest, of that offering in the sight of God, and all combine to tell us that our security is built upon Divine righteousness and truth.

If, then, we would have the joy of this immoveable security before God, we must have God's thoughts of

Jesus Christ, and Him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2);

for God has so estimated the priceless value of that finished work on the cross as to raise Him up from the dead, and give us life, righteousness, and completeness in Him. God, we know, has counted that blessed One, who humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, worthy of the highest possible exaltation. It is God who tells us that we are

now justified by His blood (Rom. 5:9),

and who gives us fullest liberty to come into the holiest of all.

Just, then, as we are seeing God's dealing with Jesus His own Son upon the tree, and learning His mind from His word and by His Spirit — His estimate of the infinite perfections of that one offering which was once offered — will our hearts be set at liberty, and established in unquestionable security before God. God hath reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ.

Next observe, that the sacrifices having been consumed with fire from heaven, glory followed. We are told that

the glory of the Lord filled the house (2 Chron. 7:1).

And does not this teach us what a sure title to glory the blood of the cross is? There is a most blessed connection between

the sacrifice

and

the glory.

Let us well consider this. The death of Christ, like a mighty lever, gives the one who believes title to the very glory of God. Like the rent veil, it removes every obstacle to going at once into God's presence. Glory must follow. We are at this moment between the cross and the glory, with liberty to enter into the holiest by faith. On no other ground whatever could we enter into the cloudless, holy presence of God, but that

Christ died for our sins (1 Cor. 15:3),

according to the Scriptures, and that He

was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father (Rom. 6:4).

We are therefore told, that

the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt- offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the LORD filled the house (2 Chron. 7:1)

No wonder, then, that we so often sing —

“O Lord, we adore Thee,

For Thou hast redeemed us;

Our title to glory

We read in Thy blood.”

Is it not most blessed to see this connection between the sacrifice and the glory? How clearly it shows us that we owe all our blessings to the blood of Christ, and that in the glory itself we shall be so deeply conscious of it, as to be for ever rejoicing in the infinite value of that blood, and giving unceasing glory to God and the Lamb.

Nothing so really humbles us as the sense of what God has wrought for us in Christ. It leaves no room for self-exaltation. It is a completed work. We are

made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5:21).

This bows the heart before God to praise and give thanks. We are therefore told, that

when all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the Lord upon the house, they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground upon the pavement, and worshipped, and praised the Lord, saying, For He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever (2 Chron. 7:3).

It is, then, being in communion with God's mind as to the glories of Christ, and the unsearchable value of His work on the cross, that the heart is really emptied of self and earth, and filled with praise and gratitude, to God. We are taken up with God, and delight to tell God what He is. This is worship.

Devotedness too will be connected with it; for the affections and desires of the heart are stirred by such wondrous mercy; and purposes of soul are formed according to the will of God. Hence this inspired narrative next tells us, that

THEN,

God's estimate of Christ in His presence, and what He is to us and has done for us, we cannot but be moved to readiness of heart and purpose to associate ourselves with Him in a world that still rejects Him, and most truly feel that His interests are our interests, His joy our joy, and that what grieves and dishonors Him also grieves and dishonors us.

We also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement (reconciliation) (Rom. 5:11).

yes,

then the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the Lord (2 Chron. 7:4).

How is it that in the present day many Christians feel it so difficult to yield themselves and their substance to the Lord? The answer is plain. It is because Christ is so little understood, — God's estimate of Him so feebly apprehended — His perfections not known. Our ignorance of Christ is

great, and very culpable. When God's revelation of the glories of His beloved Son is really known, and the infinite acceptability of His work received; when the blessed reality of being in Christ is laid hold of, our nearness to God in Him apprehended, the all-satisfying portion He is, and His all-sufficiency for us under all circumstances known; then the affections of our hearts are roused, and our energies so drawn forth, that we cry out —

“Love so amazing, so Divine,

Demands my soul, my life, my ALL.”

We are further told, that the people were
glad and merry in heart.

And why? Because of

the goodness that the Lord had shewed unto David, and to Solomon, and to Israel His people (2 Chron. 7:10).

I ask, then, in conclusion, can we fail to learn from these lessons that our present happiness, devotedness, and worship, all owe their source to God, as He has revealed Himself in Christ?
Learning

Conversion; or, Paul's Preaching at Thessalonica, and Its Effects

Ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even

Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come (1 Thess. 1:9, 10).

The gospel is still the power of God unto salvation. The same power which raised Christ from the dead brings sinners to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. It gives spiritual life to the dead, imparts peace to the tormented conscience, delivers from the love of sin and unholy associations, and makes the soul happy and at rest in the presence of God. Thus a vast change is produced. You may, perhaps, have seen a drowning man just taken out of the water in a state of senselessness and inanimation. The anxious bystanders feel for the pulse in vain; they place their ears to the mouth, and watch and listen with breathless silence for that bosom once more to heave a sigh; they move the eyelids, but all sense of light seems extinguished; they call aloud, yet not a single feature moves in response. But powerful remedies are used, and in a little while the apparently lifeless form moves, the features beam with happy intelligence, and fully manifest every faculty of vigour and animation. How great the change! How powerful the remedies! What a vast alteration in the person! Yet this is but a feeble illustration of the power of the gospel of God in those who pass from death unto life.

Those who preach should look for decided effects, and those who hear would do well to consider whether the gospel has wrought a mighty change in them. Why has it not? Because they have not believed. They have heard that Christ shed His blood for the remission of sins, but they have not believed on Him; for the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God; but it is not hearing about Christ only, but believing on Christ, that is the way of salvation; not merely knowing, as some say, the plan of salvation, but coming to Christ to be saved, that makes the power of the blessed gospel to be experienced in the soul.

After Christ had offered Himself as a sacrifice for sins on the cross, and rose from the dead, He sent forth the gospel, or word of reconciliation, to a guilty world by His servants. Among others, He specially raised up Paul, and sent him a great many places to proclaim the gospel of Divine mercy to sinners. In due time he was directed to a large city, called Thessalonica. Here the gospel was an entirely new thing. The inhabitants were for the most part idolaters, though there were many Jews there also. The Jews thought themselves the objects of God's peculiar favour, because their ancestors had been so; they prided themselves on the round of duties connected with their synagogue service, and looked with pity on their ignorant neighbours, who so perseveringly persisted in falling down and worshiping an image that their own hands had fashioned. But Paul well knew that both classes were alike guilty before God, and that none could stand in blessing except on the ground of the atoning blood of Christ. Yet he remembered that the Jews once stood in covenant relationship to God, and that the Lord Jesus, after His resurrection, commanded His apostles to preach first at Jerusalem. Accordingly he went into the synagogue of the Jews every

Sabbath-day, and reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, proving from their own prophets that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead, and preached the blessed gospel of present and eternal salvation to all who believe in Christ. Paul also preached the same gospel to the Gentile idolaters; for he knew that Jews and Gentiles were both alike under sin, whatever their birth, education, or privileges had been, and that God had met them alike in the cross of Christ; and in this way could bring both into present and eternal blessing. It is well to notice that Paul did not go into this dark city with religious forms, ceremonies, or sacraments; he did not propose to them self-improvement, education, plans for moralizing the profane, and the like. No, he struck at the root at once; he planted the cross of Christ before their minds; he proved to them that they needed salvation, that they were far from God, perishing in their sins, and declared that Jesus Christ the Son of God had died on the cross for sinners, and rose again because He had for ever put away sin; and that God now preached that finished work to them, as that which could give them present and eternal deliverance from the wrath to come. Thus he preached Christ, salvation by Christ alone, present and eternal blessing by the death and resurrection of Christ the Son of God. The idolater, who had been groping in darkness among idols of wood and stone, and the Jew, who was cleaving to formal ordinances and traditions of men, alike manifested that they were under sin, and guilty before God; and the gospel of the grace of God met them both. God in mercy spoke to them of redeeming love; and the gospel of the living and true God still comes close to the ears of Pharisees and publicans, the chaste and defiled, the Jew and Gentile, with words of mercy and peace by the death of His Son.

Oh, the wonder of wonders, that the thrice holy God should come down to sinners of every race and class with words of reconciliation, a message of pardon and peace, through the death and resurrection of His only-begotten Son! This is Divine love; this levels men, with all their boastful pretensions, to the dust; this shows God's judgment of man, whether Jew or Gentile; this reveals the fact that God is a sin-pardoning as well as a sin-hating God, giving remission of sins to every lost sinner that believes. Paul's preaching, then, was the cross. Wherever he went, he set forth Christ crucified and risen, because this alone can deliver from the wrath to come, this alone is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. But though he said,

We preach Christ crucified (1 Cor. 1:23),

we know he sometimes entered also into the coming glory of Christ, as well as of His past humiliation and suffering, as we find he did at Thessalonica. He preached to them about

another King, one Jesus (Acts 17:7).

This magnifies the glory of the cross. The fact that Christ is soon coming to receive His people unto Himself, that God is yet going to set up His blessed Son as King over all the earth, and put everything in subjection under His feet, bring every knee to bow, and every tongue to confess to Him, reflects greatly on the value of His cross, and shows God's estimate of His finished work, however men despise and reject it. Thus we see that Paul went into this heathen city with the glorious gospel of the grace of God (Acts 17). Now let us consider its effects.

THE EFFECTS of Paul's preaching at Thessalonica were two-fold; some persecuted and blasphemed, others believed and found salvation. So great was the enmity brought out by the preaching of the death, resurrection, and coming of Christ, that Paul and Silas had to escape for

their lives.

The carnal mind is enmity against God (Rom. 8:7);

it therefore cannot bear to hear of God's love in Christ. Such esteem the gospel to be foolishness, calculated to interfere with the world's ease and progress, and check man's lofty pretensions. Thus his wicked passions are stirred up, and his hatred to God and His truth manifested, in persecuting and oppressing His servants. Yet, with all this, the gospel was to many the power of God unto salvation. The Holy Spirit wrought effectually in many hearts by the truth; so that we read that

some of the Jews believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few (see Acts 17:4).

These constituted the Church of God at Thessalonica, to whom the epistles were afterwards addressed; and a beautiful sample it is of the Church of the living God, which is made up of both Jews and Gentiles, called out by the preaching of the gospel, and baptized by one Spirit into one body. Made in Christ, of twain, one new man; having resurrection-life, indwelt, and united to Christ, by the Holy Ghost, and members of His body, His flesh and bones, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, but Christ is all and in all. (See Eph.2:13-17.)

Thus the gospel prospered in this city. The glory of God in the person and work of Christ shone with such brilliancy into many hearts, as to cause Jewish tradition and formality, as well as Gentile heathenism and idolatry, to be alike laid low at the Savior's feet, and both ceased to glory in the flesh, and were enabled to glory in the Lord. The cross not only reconciled each to God, but also reconciled Jew and Gentile to each other, and brought both into the place of worship and thanksgiving before God. Each found Christ to be a suitable Savior, worthy of their heart's confidence, an object for endless contemplation and praise, and a hope full of brightness and immortality. Thus the gospel came unto them, not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance, so that the results were most decided and manifest; for Paul says,

Ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come (1 Thess. 1:9, 10).

Now let us look at the results a little more attentively.

1. **THEY TURNED TO GOD FROM IDOLS.** God drew them to Himself with cords of love. They had heard and believed that God is love. They saw in the death and triumphs of Christ unparalleled love, unsearchable wisdom, and almighty power; and they felt the boundless grace of God in presenting that salvation to them. They found the living God through Christ an object of attraction instead of dread; for they heard the sweet voice of redeeming love instead of condemnation and judgment. They knew that they were exposed to the wrath to come, and justly deserved eternal condemnation; but they saw God meeting them with mercy and peace in the wounds and death of His own most blessed Son. This amazing kindness of God melted their hearts, changed their minds, drew them heavenward, constrained them to turn to God, to confide in God, and to rest in the Father of mercies and God of all comfort. Not a god of their own fashioning, but the living God, the self-existing I AM, the First and the Last, the Creator of the

ends of the earth, the only wise God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. They thus experienced a great change, a turning from carnal objects to the Savior-God. This is conversion. It was the turning-point in their history. They were turned from darkness to light; from the power of Satan to God; to the living and true God, from dumb idols. Thus they rejoiced in knowing salvation by Christ. Their confidence was in the living and true God, who cannot deny Himself, and whose word will never pass away. Thus they were at peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ was all and in all; Christ crucified, Christ risen, Christ glorified, Christ interceding for them, Christ coming; for through Him they had found present justification, and eternal deliverance from the wrath to come. They had turned to God, and found all they could desire in Him. How, then, could idols be anything to them now? Before the deep reality of the cross of Christ, the folly and worthlessness of idols were made manifest; it was easy, therefore, to give them their proper estimate as dung and dross for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord. One believing view of Immanuel's love in His blood-shedding and death is enough to expose the world's folly, and the emptiness of its religiousness, and to allure the heart to the bosom of the Father, who so freely sent His Son to deliver us from the wrath to come.

Dear reader! has the gospel produced this great effect in you? Has the story of the Savior's tears, groans, agonies, blood-shedding, and death, melted your heart, and turned you to the bosom of the God of peace? Have you known such a turning-point in your history? Can you look back on the time when you had hard thoughts of God, dreaded appearing before Him, and wished you had never been born; but that the gospel reached you, faith came by hearing, you believed the love of God, and through the atoning death of His Son found peace with God? This is the way the Holy Spirit leads, this has been the experience of millions; and multitudes still delight to say —

“O happy day! when first we felt

Our hearts with true contrition melt,

And saw our sins of crimson guilt

All cleansed by blood on Calvary spilt.

“O happy day! when first Thy love

Began our grateful hearts to move;

And, gazing on Thy wondrous cross,

We saw all else as worthless dross.”

2. THEIR SERVICE to God was another effect of the gospel; they

turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God (1 Thess. 1:9).

The love of God constrained them to serve Him; for, according to the Savior's words,

to whom much is forgiven the same loveth much (see Luke 7:47).

They loved God because He had first loved them. A feeling of gratitude for such unfathomable mercy made His service unspeakably happy. The knowledge of the Savior's kindness made His yoke easy, and His burden light. A sense of deliverance from the wrath to come, through the death

and resurrection of Christ, is the main-spring of true service. This service is happy liberty — perfect freedom; it is the way of faith which works by love. How many mistake here. They serve in order to be saved, instead of because they have received forgiveness of sins and eternal life; and the mistake is fatal. To expect salvation in any measure by works of the flesh is a fearful delusion; to work in obedience to God, because of being pardoned and accepted in Christ, is the blessed path of the Spirit. The Savior's words are,

If ye love me, keep my commandments (John 14:15),

and

love one another; as I have loved you, &c. (John 13:34)

It is of the utmost importance to be clear on this point. It is plain that the Thessalonian converts were on right ground; for Paul addressed them as those who were (not would be, but already) delivered from the wrath to come. They knew that they served the living God. Long had they served dumb idols; but now they obeyed the living God. Persons do not believe that "God is," that His eye beholds them, His ear is open to their cry, His face set against evil-doers, that His heart loves, His arm brought salvation, and that His hand is open to satisfy the desire of every living thing. People do not think this; they do not believe that He is the living God. The language of many a heart is, "No God"; hence it is that the creature is so often set up and worshipped more than the Creator, and that so many live without God and without hope in the world, so that God is not in all their thoughts. Not so, however, were these Thessalonians; their faith and hope were in the living God, and they served Him, sought to please Him, obey Him, honor and glorify Him, who had redeemed them with nothing less than the precious blood of His own Son. They also knew Him as the true God. This was happier still. They knew He had always been true to His word, and that He would be true to His promises, true in hearing and answering prayer, true to all who put their trust in Him, true to accept their service, true to sustain them in time of trial, true to bring them through every difficulty, and true to present them faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy. Oh, if people believed that God was true, how would sinners fly to Jesus to escape the wrath to come! and how quiet would believers be in time of trouble, how submissive in affliction, patient in waiting upon God, and cheerful in the darkest dispensations! The true God has given us His own word to guide us and hope in, until wilderness experiences are past, and we shall be able, when in the glory, to look back and declare that not one jot or tittle has failed. Thus we see that the Thessalonian believers were a working people; they served the living and true God, and were well known for their works of faith and labours of love. We may be assured that turning to God through Jesus must ever be connected with loving service.

3. THEIR POSTURE OF SOUL, is also set before us as another effect of the gospel.

Ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven (1 Thess. 1:9).

This is very blessed. God looks, not only for the ready hand and willing foot, but He also looks for the patient hope — the mind and heart to be inclined in the right direction. All Christians, on realizing pardon and acceptance in Christ, find it in their hearts, more or less, to serve the living and true God; but comparatively few, in the present day, see that it is their happy privilege to wait for His Son from heaven. Many will tell us that they wait for the world to be converted by the

preaching of the gospel; but the Scriptures certainly do not teach this. Others say that they look for great changes in the nations, and especially among the scattered Jews; but the Thessalonian believers were taught by the Holy Ghost to wait for Christ. There has been much darkness as to the hope of the Church, even among true Christians; and, where the doctrine has been scripturally taught, it has not been received by many, because of their not seeing the certainty of their salvation, their own security in a risen and exalted Savior. Not able to rejoice in being already delivered from the wrath to come, how could they love the sound of the Savior's second coming? How can those who have not peace with God wait for His Son from heaven? True hope of glory must be connected with assurance of salvation. The Thessalonian believers knew, through the gospel Paul preached, that they were delivered from the coming wrath. They had no doubt of their eternal salvation by Christ; they could therefore happily wait for the return of the Son of God from heaven. Instead of considering Christ's coming with fear and dread, they anticipated it with joy and gladness. They did not wait for the world's conversion, nor for the reconstruction of the Roman Empire, nor for the restoration of the Jews to their own land, nor for any other earthly event; but, as saved ones, they served the God of love and peace, and waited for His Son from heaven. Christ Himself was their hope, as well as their confidence. The apostle afterwards taught them that the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God; and that all in Christ, whether dead or alive, will be caught up to meet Him in the air, and so be for ever with the Lord. They waited for God's Son from heaven. They knew of no happiness, no heaven, no glory, apart from the person of Christ the Son of God. They were in love with Christ. He was all their desire, as well as all their salvation. The Savior's promise,

I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also (John 14:3), was very precious to their souls. They therefore hoped for Christ — to see Him, be with Him, like Him. They might possibly die before Jesus came; but it was not death they looked for, but Christ — to be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, and caught up to meet the Lord in the air. This is the true and blessed hope, the comforting, sanctifying, soul-reviving hope of the gospel, and this was their posture of soul; their energies flowed outward in faith and love in the service of God, and upward in blessed expectation of His Son from heaven. Faith, hope, and love were thus kept in lively exercise, the true and blessed effects of the glorious gospel they had received.

And the believer is still called to wait for God's Son from heaven. Many centuries have passed since these dear Thessalonian believers thus honored the Lord Jesus, and He has not yet come; but He will come, according to promise. Yes,

He that shall come will come, and will not tarry (Heb. 10:37).

For this, too, not a few are waiting now, and can truthfully say — Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!

“Come, Lord, to the Bride of Thy love,

In fullness of majesty come;

And give us the mansions above,

Prepared in Thy heavenly home.”

Speak to the Rock

And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock; so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink. And Moses took the rod from before the Lord, as He commanded him (Num. 20:7-9).

We find the story of the smitten rock first presented to us in the book of Exodus. It took place before the law was given, and is a fine example of grace — the grace of God to ungodly, sinful man. The people were in the deepest necessity; they had no water to drink. Day after day their thirst increased. There were no wells at hand. They might make the most diligent search, and put all their energies into exercise, in digging deep in all directions, still it was a barren and thirsty land, wherein was no water. Weak, parched, and prostrate, they had no power whatever of meeting their necessity. They were perishing with thirst, and had no water to drink. But more than this. They were sinners — they murmured; they tempted God, and were ready to stone His servant. Thus they were unworthy as well as needy. God might justly have allowed them to perish, for they merited His wrath and displeasure; but He took occasion to deal in grace instead of judgment. His pitying eye beheld their need; His loving heart compassionated them; His infinite wisdom and mercy devised a way of deliverance; and His almighty arm speedily carried it out. The question was, Could God, would God, give this thirsty, sinful, perishing people water to drink? Yes, He could and would do so, consistently with His own holy attributes, and that too in a way that should be to the praise of His glory. By smiting another instead of them, His justice would be satisfied, and His mercy freely flow. This is the way of grace to sinful, helpless man in the cross of Christ, and was shewn forth in the type of the smitten rock.

The Lord said unto Moses, Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt SMITE THE ROCK, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel (Ex. 17:6).

Thus, in the way of grace, the needy sinful people had an abundant supply of water to satisfy their thirst.

I say, this is a fine example of grace, and is important, because we are told in the New Testament that we are saved by grace:

By grace are ye saved, through faith (Eph. 2:8);

but perhaps few things are so little understood as grace. It is said by some that grace means that God will do His part, if we will do ours; but this entirely destroys the thought of grace. Others say, that it means unmerited love; but it means more than this, for it brings favour and blessing to those who only deserve punishment and destruction; it brings eternal life and glory to such as have merited eternal death and banishment; and flows freely to us through the smitten Son of God, who was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. It is the death of Christ, then,

that is here typified by the smitten rock. There the stripes that we deserved were laid upon Him, and thence the water of life flows freely.

“From all His wounds new blessings flow,

A sea of joy without a shore.”

Grace, then, is only for sinners; it springs from God, is manifested in the death of Christ, and satisfies the thirsty souls of those who there taste and see that the Lord is good; and as it was only water from the smitten rock that quenched the thirst of the perishing Israelites, so it is only the blood of the cross that gives peace to a sin-sick soul. For a thirsty, perishing Israelite to have turned his back upon the waters gushing out so abundantly from the smitten rock, instead of drinking thereof, would be judged to be the height of madness; how much more so is it now to turn away from the crucified Son of God, who died to save sinners!

Having said thus much on the smiting of the rock, let us now turn more immediately to the subject before us; and first, we may notice that, after the people of Israel had drank the water from the rock, they lived, and fought the battles of the Lord; but after a while, though the rock never left them, they thirsted again, as we find in this chapter. This is a remarkable type, and serves to show us that, after we have received the Lord Jesus, after we have obtained life and peace through faith in His name, after we may have fought the battles of the Lord, after we may have drank for months and years the water of life, and enjoyed the presence of the Lord, yet we shall feel barren and thirsty, if we cease to live upon Christ; if we turn from Him, and lose the taste and comfort of His love.

In pursuing our meditation, we might remark —

1. On the state of the believer when not living upon Christ;
2. On failure in the service of God;
3. Consider what is the Christian's true path; and
4. Glance at the blessings connected with it.

1. THE STATE OF THE BELIEVER WHEN NOT LIVING UPON CHRIST. So long as we abide in the Lord Jesus, dwell on His love, live in His presence, sit at His feet, rest on His promises, feed on His word, love His ways, pour out our hearts to Him, and draw out of His fullness, our peace flows as a river; we overcome in conflict, escape out of temptation, bear our sufferings with fortitude, fight the good fight of faith, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. But when the eye and heart forget Christ, when we turn from Him as the smitten Rock, the fountain of life and love, then the barrenness and sorrows of the wilderness press heavily upon us, and disappointment, rebellion, murmuring, and other bitter fruits of unbelief easily manifest themselves. Perhaps no people act more foolishly, are more miserable, or more exhibit the unlovely tempers and evils of the flesh, than those believers who forget the Lord Jesus, and draw not refreshment and blessing out of His fullness. The enemy, finding such off their guard, easily overcomes them with his fiery darts, acts upon the pride and lusts of the flesh, until, instead of the triumphant song of

Worthy is the Lamb (Rev. 5:12),

their lips give utterance to desponding and complaining exclamations.

It has been said by another, that “the blood of Christ both strengthens our inner man, and keeps down the weeds of the flesh.” And so it is; for, in the exercise of faith, we draw from Christ, and are so spiritually strengthened, that we are able to keep under carnal lusts. But, though we be true disciples of Christ, severed from Him we grow weak spiritually, and fleshly desires and ways spring up, and are sometimes painfully manifested. Accordingly, this chapter shows us, that when the people had no water from the rock, and thirsted, that they gathered themselves together against the servants of God; that they chode with Moses, complained of the barrenness of the wilderness, and concluded that they would die, and never see the land of promise. Their experience was that of darkness, barrenness, and misery, because they got away from the only fountain of refreshment and blessing. And so it is with God’s people now. Oh, how many complaining children of God may trace their present sadness of soul, not, as they suppose, to the circumstances that have crossed their path, but to the two evils of forsaking the fountain of living waters, and hewing out to themselves broken cisterns that can hold no water! How can we be happy apart from Him who is our life and salvation? How can we be making melody in our hearts, so long as the spring of all our joys ceases to be viewed by us as the river of life to our souls? Those who cleave to the Lord Jesus, and walk in His ways, may assuredly count upon the comfort of the Holy Ghost as their portion; and while they will not be without the trials of the wilderness, they will realize the present help and mercy of God in trouble, and in God’s own good time deliverance from trouble. Thus abiding in the Lord Jesus, we shall be happy and fruitful, but severed from Him we shall be barren and unhappy; and, as the apostle Peter saith, such will be blind, unable to see afar off, and will forget that they were purged from their old sins. How important, then, that the Christian should not feed on ashes, or seek in any measure satisfaction at the worldling’s swine-trough; but, knowing that Christ is all, live upon Christ — His person, work, fitness, fullness, and offices; hide, as it were, in His wounds, drink deeply into His gracious words and ways, treasure up His promises, eat His flesh, dwell on His unutterable and unchanging love, seek more and more His unsearchable riches; so that the constant language of our souls may be, His mouth is most sweet, yea, He is altogether lovely. This is my Beloved, and this is my Friend (S of S 5:16).

2. FAILURE IN SERVICE is also recorded in this affecting narrative. Moses desired to serve the Lord, and to serve His people; but he did not do so in God’s way; instead, therefore, of its being acceptable service, it was so displeasing to the Lord, that he was not allowed to go into the land on account of it. It was zeal, but not according to knowledge. God told Moses to take the rod, but did not tell him to use it as he did. He was also told to speak to the rock, but instead of that he smote it. God used no rebuke in speaking to His servant about the assembly, but Moses called them rebels (Num. 20:10).

All these things show that Moses was not serving in the temper and spirit of the Lord. To seek to satisfy God’s thirsty people was well, but he did not act in it for the glory of God. And it is important to notice that, notwithstanding Moses’ failure, God acted then, as He often does now — He brought blessing to the people, though He chastened His servant for his inconsistent conduct. The failure was very great, not only in its not being obedience to the Lord’s plain command, but in spoiling the type, which was, doubtless, intended to teach us that the rock once smitten, need

never be smitten again, but would give forth refreshing streams at the cry of faith, as we now know Christ.

The rod here was evidently not the rod of Moses, wherewith he smote the rock; that rod Moses took with him on the top of the hill, after the rock in Horeb was smitten, and we never hear of it afterwards. Moses' rod there did its work, and the type teaches us that the law had its claims met in the wounds, bruises, and death of the Son of God. The rod ordered to be taken in this scene at Meribah was the rod which was before the Lord (Num. 20:9), which was Aaron's rod (see Num. 17:1-5), and teaches us not about smiting, but about the resurrection and priesthood of Christ. We are told that this dead rod

budded, and brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds (Num. 17:8).

And was laid up before the testimony

and the Lord said, Thou shalt quite take away their murmurings from me, that they die not (Num. 17:10).

Thus we see shadowed forth the resurrection and priesthood of Christ. It can, therefore, easily be seen how consistent with the truth it would be for Moses to hold forth this beautiful rod beside the rock gushing with his waters at his word, and how contrary to the typical meaning it was to smite the rock, especially with such a rod. How blessed now to know Jesus in resurrection-glory as the Rock once smitten to save His people from death, but now before the Lord; and that we have only to contemplate Him to be filled with adoring gratitude, only to speak to Him, and His blessings flow with abundant refreshment.

How much religious service in the present day, we fear, is not acceptable to God! How much there may be that God's eye detects as being chiefly the busy energy of the flesh, and not spiritual — not in the obedience of faith — not in accordance with the truth of God! How important that we should not only be addicting ourselves to the Lord's work, but that we should carry it out in God's way, and for His glory! But this leads us to consider —

3. THE CHRISTIAN'S TRUE PATH. Declension of soul, and failure in service, generally go together, as we see in Peter, who first followed the Lord

afar off (Luke 22:54),

and in mistaken zeal,

cut off the servant's ear (see John 18:10).

The Christian's true path is communion with God, and obedience to His word; and the backsliding and failing Christian must return thence, if he would be happy, and glorify God. The believer's calling is unto

fellowship with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ (see 1 John 1:3);

to walk with God, to realize that all his springs are in Him, and to wait for His Son from heaven. Christ, the true Rock that was smitten, is his all-satisfying portion. He has to do with the Lord Jesus who was crucified, who said,

It is finished (John 19:30)!

and bowed His head, and gave up the Ghost. He knows that that one finished work of eternal redemption is perfect, and that by it He hath perfected for ever all those who truly believe in Him; so that there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins. He, therefore, looks to Jesus risen and glorified, the slain Lamb on the right hand of God, as the One who has all power in heaven and in earth. His business, then, in every need is to

Speak to the Rock (see Num. 20:8),

and to prove that living water continually flows from Him.

The Christian has generally much joy at first, because his thirst is satisfied by simply drinking of the waters of the smitten rock, and Christ is all to him. He knows little of the deceitfulness of his own heart, the trials of the wilderness, or of the seductions of Satan. After a while, however, when unexpected difficulties and necessities cross his path, he perhaps unconsciously loses sight of Christ, by being taken up with the sorrowful circumstances, and thirsts for refreshment and comfort. But where will he find it? Surely he will find it flow only from that same Rock which at first quenched his thirst, the Lamb who is now in the midst of the throne. This, then, is the Christian's true course: looking unto Jesus, abiding in Jesus, drawing from Jesus, learning of Jesus, whose ways are ways of pleasantness, and all His paths are peace; or as the apostle expresses it,

Be careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God (Phil. 4:6).

Speak to the Rock; every need should lead us to the fullness of the Lord Jesus; every temptation to His sympathy and power; every occasion of blessing with thanksgiving to Him; every sorrow should lead us to contemplate the sorrows of Jesus; every act of service should be done in dependence on the Lord Jesus; yea, concerning everything we should speak to Him. Those who thus set the Lord always before them will experience that He is at their right hand, and that they cannot be moved.

“Happy they who trust in Jesus;

Sweet their portion is, and sure.”

Oh, ye dear children of God! are you cast down by reason of the trials of the way? Are you oppressed, and fainting under a sense of your many needs, many sorrows, many achings of heart?

Oh, speak to the Rock! Go and tell the Lord Jesus all your sorrows, and all your perplexities; yea, tell Him all — pour out your heart before Him. He will refresh your spirit, lift up your hands that hang down, sustain your confidence, give you wisdom, and show you that He careth for you. He bids you trust in Him at all times — not some times, but all times — therefore speak to Him this time. You may have proved it a blessed thing to speak to Him in times past: oh, speak to Him now! Cast all your care on Him, for He says, He careth for you. Cast every burden upon the Lord, and He will sustain you. You need not fear any sorrow, if it only lead you to the Lord Jesus; and every felt need will be a blessing, if it only be a fresh errand to the mercy-seat. Fellow-Christians! the Rock still gives forth His water, and refreshing streams still flow freely to us from our Lord Jesus. It

is vain to look elsewhere. Princes cannot help us. Creatures are broken cisterns; and it is written, Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help (Isa. 31:1)!

and,

Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm (Jer. 17:5).

Without Christ we can do nothing; but there is no uncertainty in calling upon the Lord Jesus.

Speak to the Rock, and it shall give forth His waters (see Num. 20:8).

Such is the way of blessing; for it is written,

Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him (Psa. 2:12).

Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors (Prov. 8:34).

In this way only will true Christians be happy, and thus be fitted for the Lord's work; for

the joy of the Lord is your strength (Neh. 8:10).

It is only by the written word, unfolded to us by the Spirit, that we know how to serve God acceptably.

If a man love me, he will keep my words (John 14:23),

said Jesus. It seemed a little thing when God said,

Speak to the rock,

that Moses should smite it; but it dishonored God. God's word is to be heeded by us, and obeyed; and drinking of the water from the rock and honoring His word, we shall render acceptable service. The importance of simply obeying God's word is again taught us in 1 Sam. 15, God commanded Saul to slay all the Amalekites, but Saul only slew some. This was disobedience; and God told him, that

to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams (1 Sam. 15:22).

We see another example in the days of David. God had ordered that none were to carry the ark of God but the Levites; but David ordered it otherwise. The consequence was, that disappointment, chastisement, and failure, accompanied the service (see 1 Chron. 13:10); but afterwards, when the king acted according to the word of the Lord, and rendered acceptable service, it was connected with the Lord's blessing, and the people's joy and gladness. How important, then, that we should beware of the traditions of men, and heed and obey the written word of God!

4. Let us now glance at THE BLESSINGS CONNECTED WITH DRINKING OF THE WATER FROM THE ROCK. The people's thirst was quenched, their murmurings ceased, their spirits were refreshed, and their hearts were cheered. But the sequel shows us two things more: first, that they acted graciously; and secondly, they fought against the enemies of the Lord valiantly. In reference to the first point, we are told that they sent kind messages to the king of Edom, and when the Edomites repeatedly refused to let Israel pass through their land on any terms, they went another

way. This was carrying out the mind of God, for Edom was Israel's brother after the flesh; and it reminds us of the fact, that those who taste and enjoy most of the grace of God will be kind, yielding, and gracious to others. Who would have thought, a short time before, that those rebellious Israelites would be so soon seen acting in such a gracious temper; but they had drank of the water from the rock — they had seen and believed the goodness of the Lord, and this had made the difference.

With regard to the second point, when the Canaanites attacked them, and took some of their brethren prisoners, they went forth in the strength of the Lord, and fought valiantly and successfully against the enemy, and utterly destroyed both them and their cities. They fought for their fallen brethren, and against the enemies of the Lord. Is it possible that these very people were so recently chiding with Moses, and setting themselves against him and Aaron? Yes; but they had drank of the water from the rock; they had been restored in their minds to a consciousness that God was for them, and not against them, and this had made the difference. Do not such considerations so endear the cross of Christ to our souls, that we cheerfully sing –

“The more, through grace, ourselves we know,

The more rejoiced are we to bow

In faith beneath Thy cross;

To trust in Thine atoning blood,

And look to Thee for every good,

And count all else but loss.”

Soon, beloved, the Lord Jesus will come again, and our pilgrimage days will have for ever passed away; we shall then no longer know the sorrows and drought of a barren wilderness. Now it is our highest privilege to

Speak to the Rock

— to hold intercourse by faith with our blessed Lord Jesus, whom having not seen we love; then we shall see Him face to face, and admiring His eternal beauties and excellencies with unmingled and unchanging joy and gratitude, we shall be FOR EVER WITH THE LORD.

The New Birth

Ye must be born again (John 3:7).

In our Lord's discourse with Nicodemus, we see how wisely, faithfully, and graciously He met a professedly religious man. The Lord's mode of dealing with this Pharisee was different from His way with the woman of Samaria. The latter was a notoriously sinful woman, unconscious of her guilty state; the blessed Lord therefore brought her at once to a sense of her ignorance and foul course, by saying,

Go, call thy husband, and come hither (John 4:16).

But the former case was that of an outwardly blameless man blinded by false religion; the first thing, therefore the Lord did with him was to cut down his religion, root and branch, and then show him that he was a perishing sinner needing mercy, and, like a bitten Israelite, could only live by looking to God's remedy. The religion of this man of the Pharisees, I say, was false, though not altogether so; for Satan's deadliest snares are composed of a mixture of truth and error. It was so with the woman in the garden, and also with the Pharisees, and it is common also in the present day. Nicodemus believed in God, assented to the veracity of the Scriptures, held the existence of both angels and spirits, and the resurrection of the body. These points were according to truth; but the grand foundation-truth of the gospel — redemption by blood— was thought nothing of; this was the fatal error. The measure of truth, little as it was, held by a man of such dignity and education, only tended to keep his mind in darkness, and enable him more successfully to spread his false religion among those who came in his way; whereas, a person wallowing in pollution and transgression, without any religious profession, would have no such temptation; hence our Lord said of some,

Publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you (Matt. 21:31).

The erroneous character of this man's religion was soon exposed by our blessed Lord, for He knew what was in man. The religion of this

man of the Pharisees (John 3:1)

was not spiritual. He knew nothing of the new birth. This is fatal ignorance. He passed over man's fall in Adam, and his being now dead in trespasses and sins; he saw no necessity for repentance, or the new birth, and yet took his place as a religious man, offering service in the name of God as if he were holy instead of being polluted; considering himself a creditable member of a popular religious sect, and considered worthy of dignity and esteem as such by others. But it was carnal religion, which, we are told, cannot please God; and as man in the flesh cannot rise above his own level, it was necessarily connected with walking and acting to be seen of men, instead of as in the sight of God —

Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God (Luke 16:15).

But Nicodemus had heard of Jesus, and desired some intercourse with Him. How, then, could it be accomplished? How could this honored

Master of Israel (John 3:10),

this

ruler of the Jews (John 3:1),

have an interview with the despised Nazarene? What would the people say? Nicodemus, however, was not at rest, for he believed that Jesus was

a teacher come from God (John 3:2),

and see Him he must. He therefore came to Jesus by night; for in this way he could satisfy his conscience without displeasing men, or exposing himself to their scorn and persecution. Such is man. Such was the spirit in which this

man of the Pharisees (John 3:1)

approached the Lord of glory. His thought was about Jesus being a teacher. He might have imagined it would be beneficial to him professionally to listen to His instruction. Though he was constantly occupied with the letter of Scripture, and the religious duties of the synagogue, it does not appear to have once entered his mind that he was a sinner, and needed a Savior. Now pause, and mark the way of Christ with this man. Did He say, You come to me in such an unworthy way, I cannot grant you an audience? Did He say, Cast away this and that first, and then I'll speak to you? Did He say, Get better first, and then I'll receive you? Oh, no. The loving Savior in this, as in every other instance, fulfilled His own blessed word,

Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out (John 6:37).

How full of encouragement this is, and how blessedly it unfolds to us the graciousness of the Lord Jesus! Nicodemus did not see that he was

condemned already (John 3:18),

and exposed to the wrath of God. Alas, alas! a

Master of Israel,

a teacher of others, and not concerned about his own salvation. Religion not true, a religion of dead works, the religion of the fathers, the religion of the people, the rites and customs of synagogue duties, with their attendant honors and official trappings, was the powerful current which was hurling this

ruler of the Jews,

and others, downward at a fearfully rapid course, and that, too, without any idea of God's way of salvation. How very solemn! But is it not the same now? What is the real condition of thousands around us? Is it that they deny the existence of Almighty God? Do they contend that He should not be worshipped? Do they set aside ecclesiastical office? Do they dispute the veracity of the Holy Scriptures? Certainly not. But if you ask them if they have experienced the new birth, you will find

that some will hang down their heads in confusion; others will judge you a ranter, or a wild fanatic; while others will try to shelter themselves behind some delusive sacramental form, and deny altogether the truth of the new birth by the word of truth, and the sovereign power of the Holy Ghost. But some, perhaps, may say, Is it not very uncharitable to conclude, that all who have not experienced the new birth are hastening on the broad road to eternal destruction? May there not be something good and hopeful in them without this? We unhesitatingly reply, No; because the Lord Jesus said,

Except a man be BORN AGAIN, HE CANNOT SEE the kingdom of God (John 3:3).

Oh that the Holy Spirit might so work in the hearts of thousands of professors around us, that they might know the folly and unprofitableness of that religion which does not begin with being

born again!

The first word of our text shows us how pointed and personal our Lord was in His ministry —

YE must be born again (John 3:7).

This tells out His faithful love. He did not propound dry doctrines, or get up eloquent addresses, to please the itching ears of His audience. No. He was the Faithful Witness, and He came not to destroy, but to save. He knew the worth of the soul, and salvation had its paramount claim in His mind. His loving heart would bear with the unworthy manner in which He was approached, and set salvation before His hearers in the plainest and most pointed way. To the cavilling Jews in the synagogue His word was,

Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you (John 6:53).

On another occasion He said,

Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world. I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am, ye shall die in your sins (John 8:23, 24).

Again we see Him standing in the midst of a crowd, and saying,

Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish (Luke 13:3, 5).

To the careless Samaritan He said,

If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith unto thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water (John 4:10).

He said to the seeking blind man,

What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee? (Luke 18:41).

And when he replied,

Lord, that I may receive my sight (Luke 18:41),

Jesus said unto him,

Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee (Luke 18:42).

And so in the text before us, our Lord did not set before Nicodemus some profound points of theology for his consideration, as the ruler perhaps expected; neither was it a display of eloquence, such as a learned man might have appreciated; neither did He set truth in a general way before him. No; He came at once to the point, and said,

YE must be born again (John 3:7)!

Oh that searching word, YE! This is Divine ministry; this is the way of the perfect preacher; and this is the style that should be imitated in the present day. It is when the Holy Ghost powerfully and personally applies the truth, so as to say to the conscience,

Thou art the man (2 Sam. 12:7),

that decided good may be expected. Persons may read the Bible, and think it is all about others; they may hear the gospel, and say that the preacher was very faithful to some present; but it is when a person feels that the truth read or heard affects himself, that we may expect blessed results. "Oh, yes," said a learned gentleman, after reading the epistle to the Romans, "I see this doctrine in the Bible." "But do you feel it in your heart?" replied his friend. That question led him to consider, and make the truth of such personal application as to be the means of his conversion. Fellow- Christians! we should be pointed and personal, as well as deeply affectionate, in putting the gospel before persons, both publicly and privately. Clear doctrines are not enough. We should remember our Master's oft-repeated word, YE! People do not think we are in earnest and sincere, if we only make general statements. I was much struck the other day in reading an account of a young man. A faithful servant of Christ said to him, "Do you know that you are going on to perdition?" "No!" said he, "neither do I think your people believe it either. My mother is one of your congregation, and I am sure she loves me dearly; and if she believed it, I am persuaded she would have told me of it. My sister also goes there; she loves me very much; and I am sure, if she believed it, she would throw her arms round my neck, and say, Don't, oh, don't go to perdition!"

We may next notice how decidedly the Lord insisted on the necessity of the new birth —

Ye **MUST** be born again (John 3:7).

Not you may, but you must; not, you should desire it merely, but you must. Yes, without the new birth, you must be for ever in darkness —

you cannot see the kingdom of God (see John 3:3);

without the new birth, you must be shut out for ever from the presence of God —

you cannot enter into the kingdom of God (see John 3:5).

How plain! how decisive! How essential to be

born of the Spirit (John 3:6)!

This secret of the new birth the learned Pharisee was entirely ignorant of, and vainly tried to argue the impossibility of a second birth; but it only drew from the loving, faithful heart of Jesus a thrice-repeated testimony to the absolute necessity of it, and the explanation that the new birth

was from above and spiritual. This positive declaration at once cut at the root of the Pharisee's religion, and razed to the ground all his cherished confidence and expectation; for it pronounced a verdict on the best man in the flesh, as being so apostate and corrupt as to be unfit for the presence of God. But while it exposed man's total inability to fit himself for the kingdom of God, it referred to the power and goodness of God in quickening the dead in trespasses and sins. The doctrine our Lord here propounds is of the highest importance; for men may be moral, amiable, benevolent, outwardly religious, and the like, yet they must be born again. They may be high even in ecclesiastical office, far advanced in theological education, yet they must be born again. Man's thought of religion is, that he must gradually improve, and perhaps be ultimately good enough to be saved. God's religion is, first to have life, and then rejoice in an assured hope of glory. Man's thought is to work for life; God's way is to work from life. Man proposes to himself eternal life at the end; God presents it to the true believer at the very beginning. Man's wisdom consists in the reformation and improvement of the flesh, with persevering efforts to pile up a quantity of supposed creature-merit and self-righteousness; the Lord Jesus knocks it all down with that uncompromising sentence,

Ye MUST be born again.

But what are we to understand by the new birth?

Ye must be BORN AGAIN.

Certainly it is not an alteration of the old fleshly nature into that which is spiritual; for our Lord in the previous verse clearly shows the distinction between the two natures and the two births:

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit (John 3:6).

The apostles too, in their writings, continually keep up this distinction of the two natures, not only as a matter of doctrine, but also of experience and practice. The believer is spoken of as made a partaker of the Divine nature, and as having the Spirit of Christ in him; his experience is referred to as necessarily one of conflict, because of the opposite workings of the two natures — flesh and Spirit:

The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would (Gal. 5:17).

While in reference to practice, he is exhorted to

walk in the Spirit,

and

not fulfil the lusts of the flesh (Gal. 5:16);

to

put off . . . the old man which is corrupt, . . . and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness (Eph. 4:22-24).

This is a subject of immense importance; for if a really exercised soul imagines that being born again is a conversion of the old Adam, sinful nature into that which is holy, he cannot have perfect

peace; for he must find that his experience does not correspond with the idea. Hence many a quickened soul thinks he cannot be a Christian, because he finds, with a principle of delight in the law of God, that there is another principle working in him which is contrary to holiness; while the truth is, he would not be

born again,

if he had no experience of this inward conflict. His conscience must find peace alone through the blood of the cross. Instead of Paul saying that he felt sin was rooted out of him, he says,

Sin dwelleth in me (see Rom. 7:17);

though instead of obeying it, he by the Spirit mortified the deeds of the body, he kept his body under and brought it into subjection. He regarded his (the)

old man (Rom. 6:6)

as an enemy, and kept it under; and exhorted saints not to fulfil the lusts of the flesh, but to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. Being

born again

clearly, then, is not a conversion of

the flesh

into

the Spirit.

Neither does the new birth consist in mere outward reformations and moral amendments; for a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit (see Matt. 7:18).

Let the immoral become moral, the licentious chaste, or the drunkard sober, still, before God, he is only

born of the flesh (John 3:6).

You may trim neatly, or cut off the branches of a thorn tree, and make its appearance more agreeable to the eye, still it is a thorn, and cannot bear grapes. The new birth, then, is something very different from outward reformation. Neither are persons born again by sacramental rites. It is easy to say it is so, but it is a fearful delusion. It is true that our Lord spoke of being born of water, but it was of water and of the Spirit:

Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God (John 3:5).

By water our Lord, doubtless, referred to the word of grace, that

living water

which God dispenses to thirsty souls, as presented in the story of the woman of Samaria (John 4:10-14). We read also in the first epistle of Peter of being

born again (1 Pet. 1:23)

by the word.

The new birth is a spiritual work,

so is every one that is born of the Spirit (John 3:8).

We feel His operations in our hearts, but we can tell nothing of His coming or going: It is a heavenly work; we are born from above [margin]. It is not man's work, but the work of God; we are born not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of men, but of God (see John 1:13).

It is a new life, so that those who are partakers of it are new creatures:

If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17).

It is done once and for ever; we are

born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever (1 Pet. 1:23).

This new creation, then, is clearly the work of God the Holy Ghost by the word:

We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, &c. (Eph. 2:10)

Nicodemus might well be astounded at our Lord's decisive preaching, and exclaim,

How can these things be? (John 3:9).

which at once opened the door for our Lord to present to him the wondrous story of the cross. Having broken down the ruler's religion by the doctrine of the new birth, Jesus now presents to him the glorious salvation of the God of all grace, and shows him that the only place a man can truthfully take is that of a perishing sinner, and a receiver of life from Him. This is the way in which sinners are born again. Man is a fallen creature; he has been driven out from the presence of God, and is

dead in sins (Eph. 2:5).

Jesus is the fountain of life, and the cross is the fountain opened; there the water of life flows freely. Christ crucified is the smitten Rock, whence streams of living water flow abundantly to the needy and undone; and there the Spirit brings perishing, thirsty souls, to look and live; to drink and live for ever. Wherever else they drink they thirst again, but whoso drinketh of the water that Jesus gives shall never thirst, but it shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. Yes, Jesus crucified, risen, and glorified, is everlasting consolation, a never-failing, soul-satisfying portion. There is no possibility of being born again, apart from Christ crucified and risen. There the river of life flows. There it is written,

Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely (Rev. 22:17).

Such, thus believing on the Lord Jesus for salvation, have received Him whom God hath sent, and have passed from death unto life.

An intelligent Israelite ought to have known something about the new birth. The plain statement of Ezekiel,

I will give them a new heart (see Ezek. 11:19),

should have been enough to have taught the ruler this, while the prophet's vision of the resurrection of the dry bones should have shown him that God is the Quickener of the dead. Our Lord, therefore, exposes still further the ignorance of this

man of the Pharisees (John 3:1)

by the question,

Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? (John 3:10)

The ruler's question, however,

How can these things be? (John 3:9)

was speedily responded to; and the difficulty, of how a man is born again, was very simply and beautifully told out by our Lord. He refers the enquirer to His own Scriptures; the Book of Numbers is selected, and the well-known tale of the serpent of brass is brought forth as the key to unlock the mystery of the new birth. The Pharisee's conscience is brought at once to the fountain of living water; the bitten, dying Israelites are depicted as receiving life through looking at the serpent of brass lifted up; and there Nicodemus might learn that, with all his Pharisaic religion and theological science, he is still dead in sins, and, like the bitten Israelite, must perish, unless he look simply to the Son of man lifted up on Calvary's cross. By looking only to the brazen serpent, the dying Israelite lived; and so now, dead and ruined sinners receive life eternal only by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It was life, eternal life, that Christ presented to the sinful Pharisee, as the free gift of God to

every one (John 6:40),

any one (see John 7:37, 10:9), whosoever (John 3:15, 16)

believeth on the Son of God.

In this beautiful discourse with Nicodemus, our Lord showed also how competent He was for this great work of giving new life to the dead in sins, and also of the amazing power and virtue of the work of the cross, by telling him that He was Son of God as well as Son of man — God and man in one person — in heaven and yet on earth.

No man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, &c. (John 3:13-17).

The Lord also most plainly showed the freeness of the grace of God, that is, the willingness of His heart to receive all, and cast out none that come to Him, by twice saying,

Whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.

The doctrine of the new birth is therefore taught by our Lord in connection with the cross. A new birth is inseparable from new life; that new life is here defined to be not temporal, but eternal, and as flowing only to us from God, through the death of Christ, and that to every one that believeth. Therefore our Lord told Nicodemus, that to be born again of water and of the Spirit, he must take the place of a ruined, perishing sinner before the Son of God, who was crucified, and thus he would receive eternal life, and stand no longer as one condemned, but as having pardon and acceptance with God. This, indeed, is being born of God. The Holy Spirit always directs the soul to the person and work of Christ. The Holy Ghost does not say, Look at me for salvation, look to my operations for peace, look to my gifts for assurance. Oh, no! He is the Glorifier of Christ, therefore He saith, Look to Jesus lifted up, look to the Lamb slain, the Savior of sinners; believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved; and if we be led of the Spirit, we shall surely testify of Christ. Were I merely to preach, Ye must be born again, it would be no message of glad tidings, no balm for the weary and heavy laden, no comfort for the anxious enquirer; but when we connect with the doctrine of the new birth the blessed truth, that Christ crucified is an ocean of boundless love, an overflowing fountain of living water, a well of everlasting life to every sinner that believes, we announce good tidings of great joy.

My reader, what think YOU of Christ? Has your thirsty soul drank the living water of His salvation? or are you perishing with hunger while there is bread enough and to spare in the Father's house? The fashion, pleasure, and honor of this present evil world are rapidly passing away. The summons of the God of all flesh may soon call you into His presence. Your own conscience admonishes you that you are a sinner. Experience has long ago convinced you that you are hastening to the chamber of death. You have often tried earth's best refreshments, and as often proved that he that drinketh of this water shall thirst again. You have avoided the foul habits of the licentious; you have shunned the companionship of the riotous; you have declined to walk with scoffers; you refuse the assumptious vanity of rationalists; you have withdrawn from Socinian blasphemy, and the infidelity of popery; but have you been born again? or, in other words, have you, as a guilty, undone sinner, been brought into God's presence, and believed on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation? If not, dear reader, let me affectionately say to you, that you are dead in sins, and what you want is life — eternal life! Sacraments and ordinances of any kind cannot give you life. Separation from immoralities cannot give you life. Withdrawing from the foulest forms of blasphemy and delusion still leaves you without life. Enlisting yourself among the ranks of your most religious neighbours cannot give you life. The strictest outward propriety cannot give you life. Neither can church office, ecclesiastical honors, or theological knowledge, as we have seen in Nicodemus, give you life. God only can give you life, and that life — eternal life — is in His Son Jesus Christ. Beware, then, lest you die without Christ; for

he that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him (John 3:36).

"Rise, my soul! behold, 'tis Jesus!

Jesus fills thy wondering eyes;

See Him now, in glory seated,

Where thy sins no more can rise.

“There, in righteousness transcendent,
Lo! He doth in heaven appear;
Shows the blood of His atonement
As thy title to be there.

“All thy sins were laid upon Him;
Jesus bore them on the tree;
God, who knew them, laid them on Him;
And, believing, thou art free.

“God now brings thee to His dwelling,
Spreads for thee His feast divine;
Bids thee welcome, ever telling
What a portion there is thine.

“In that circle of God’s favour —
Circle of the Father’s love —
All is rest, and rest for ever,
All is perfectness above.

“Blessed, glorious word, “For ever!”
Yea, “for ever” is the word;
Nothing can the ransomed sever,
Nought divide them from the Lord.”

Law and Grace

For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit (Rom. 8:3, 4).

It is not by persuasive eloquence, clear reasoning, appalling sights, or by thrilling appeals to the natural feelings, that people are converted to God. No. It is by the word of truth. Our Lord taught this. He said,

If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead (Luke 16:31);

as much as to say, They have the Bible, they hear sound gospel- preaching, and if the truth does not move them, nothing else will make them flee from the wrath to come. Christ is the truth. The Holy Ghost is the Spirit of truth; and it is the truth that He uses in converting souls. It is the Spirit's office to guide into all truth; and surely in these days we are made to hear the voice of God very peculiarly, saying,

Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts (Zech. 4:6).

At a time like this, when we see men using human appliances, and contending for expediency; when we so often hear of such sad statements as "handmaids of the gospel," "stepping stones of the gospel," &c., it is most important to see that it is the truth alone which really accomplishes the work of God. We find this often brought before us in the Scriptures. Peter informs us that we are

Born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever

and how necessary that those who listen should take heed to what they receive, so that their faith may not stand in the wisdom of men, but on the word of the living and true God, which will never pass away!

Perhaps nothing has so corrupted the truth of the gospel as the common practice of blending the law with it. Few things are more dissimilar, and kept more distinct in the Scriptures, yet they are often so mingled together in the present day as to destroy the simplicity and truth of both law and gospel. It was in this way the truth of Christ was so corrupted among the Galatian saints, that the apostle faithfully told them that Christ had become of no effect unto those who were justified by the law, for they were fallen from grace. It is, then, a matter of great importance to be able clearly to distinguish between law and gospel; for the believer is not under the law, but under grace.

In pursuing our enquiry after the truth of God concerning these subjects, it will be well to consider

What we are to understand by the law

What were its effects?

What is grace, and its effects?

Notice some points of special contrast between the law and the gospel and

Make some application of the subject

(1 Pet. 1:23).

James says,

Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth (James 1:18).

Paul declares,

In Christ Jesus, I have begotten you through the gospel (1 Cor. 4:15).

And our Lord's promise to His disciples was,

Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free (John 8:32).

These inspired testimonies should be carefully pondered, because they show us the immense value that God puts on the truth, as well as our deep responsibility in relation to it. And oh, how thankful should we be for the Bible! How blessed to have such an unalterable standard of truth! What condescension of the Holy Spirit to come down to reveal and apply the truth to us! How careful should we be to ascertain what the truth of God is! How prayerfully should we search the Scriptures, in dependence on the Spirit's teaching, for the truth! How important that those who preach should

preach the Word (2 Tim. 4:2);

1. WHAT ARE WE TO UNDERSTAND BY THE LAW?

What the law could not do (Rom. 8:3).

By the law in this text is evidently meant the commands given to Israel on Mount Sinai four hundred and thirty years after the call of Abraham (Gal. 3:17). It made righteous demands upon man, promising life to those who fully obeyed —

This do, and thou shalt live (Luke 10:28);

and pronouncing a curse on those who were disobedient in any degree —

Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them (Gal. 3:10).

Thus we see that the law knew nothing of mercy, but its demands were so strict that an offender in one point was held guilty of all (James 2:10). It is therefore vain and delusive for persons to try to shelter themselves under the idea, that because they are not conscious of having broken all the laws of God, they are not exposed to His just condemnation. Nor is it reasonable. Man's sense of justice towards his fellow-man is, that the breaker of one of the laws of the country has committed an act of rebellion, and is therefore deservedly exposed to punishment. It is not necessary for a

man to have perpetrated robbery twenty times before he is pronounced guilty; but if in one instance he is proved to have committed an act of robbery, he is liable to punishment as a breaker of the law. And is God less just than man? Certainly not. He is just in condemning and executing vengeance on all breakers of His holy law. The question of the law is not, how much have you transgressed, or how many breaches of the law are you guilty of? but have you sinned at all? for the soul that sinneth, it shall die (Ezek. 18:4).

God has only one character of condemnation for sin, that is, death — eternal death.

The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23).

The law of Moses consisted of two tables, one containing laws relating to man's conduct toward God, and the other to his conduct toward his neighbour.

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself (Luke 10:27).

These were the demands of the law. There was nothing unholy or unjust in it, and a person coming up at all times, and in all things, to this standard, would prove himself a righteous person, and would live. We may try to modify the law, or to pare down its sweeping demands, or endeavour to excuse ourselves for not complying with it, in order to meet the exercises of conscience; but the law permits nothing of the kind. If the law is broken, curse must follow. Neither did all the ordinances and sacrifices offered under the law alter this or remove the guilt; because it is impossible that the blood of bulls and of goats could take away sin: the most these things could do was to give ceremonial cleanness, and to point to that future sacrifice, which would make an end of sin, and bring in everlasting righteousness. The law was a rigid test to try and make manifest. If there were no laws in the country, there could be no transgression, and, consequently, no punishment; but if laws were made, the offenders would be made known, and its demands executed, for such is the nature of law; therefore it is written,

The law worketh wrath; for where no law is, there is no transgression (Rom. 4:15).

2. THE EFFECTS OF THE LAW.

It was weak through the flesh (Rom. 8:3);

that is, it was unable to meet man's need, because he was a fallen, helpless sinner. Scarcely had the terrible thunders and terrors of Mount Sinai passed, and the people put themselves under the obligations of the law, when they were found dancing round a golden calf, exclaiming,

These be thy gods, O Israel, that brought thee up out of the land of Egypt (Ex. 32:4)!

thus violating the first sentence of the law, which said,

Thou shalt have no other gods before me (Ex. 20:3).

The law, then, at once proved man a transgressor, and justly called for the execution of the sentence of death; accordingly we are told, that

there fell of the people that day about three thousand men (Ex. 32:28).

The subsequent history of those under the law was very similar, consisting chiefly of a succession of rebellions and judgments, so that instead of life and righteousness coming by the law, it wrought condemnation and death; no one was justified by it, but every one proved guilty. The demands of the law served to show what was in man, as Paul said,

I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet (Rom. 7:7).

Thus, holy, just, and good as the law was, it proved an insufficient instrument to meet man's necessity, by reason of the weak and corrupt character of the flesh. A man might be a most efficient sculptor; but if the marble was not able to bear the touches of the chisel, the work would be very imperfect. Another man might be an elegant writer, but the paper and ink might be most unfit for him to carry out his design. Every touch of the sculptor's chisel, and every stroke of the artist's pen, would thus only show the worthlessness of the marble, and the inferior quality of the paper. So man, shapen in iniquity, and by nature a child of wrath, with a heart alienated from God, when tried by the standard of God's holy law, is made manifest as coming short, and

found wanting (Dan. 5:27). Therefore,

saith the apostle,

by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:20).

No persons, therefore, were saved by the law. Even those who lived under the law were saved by grace; for instance,

David describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom, the Lord will not impute sin (see Rom. 4:6-8).

The Lord Jesus was the only law-fulfiller; He obeyed every jot and tittle of it; but we have all sinned, and become subject to the wrath of God. The law could only make sin known, but could not put sin away.

The blindness and ignorance of the human heart is seen in the readiness with which men put themselves under law. Though the trials the children of Israel had experienced after they left Egypt had so proved their weakness, and brought out such murmuring, yet directly the law was given, notwithstanding the dreadful terrors of Sinai, they unhesitatingly covenanted to fulfil all its demands, and said,

All the words which Jehovah hath said will we do (Ex. 24:3).

It was an easy thing to say this; but, alas! their subsequent history proved them to be a disobedient and gainsaying people (Rom. 10:21).

And is unregenerate man less so now? Is he not the same still? Hath the Ethiopian changed his skin, or the leopard his spots? Has fallen man changed his own heart, or proved himself otherwise than a breaker of God's law? Where is the man that can say, I have loved the Lord my God with all

my heart, and with all my soul, and with all my strength, and with all my mind, and my neighbour as myself? Oh, it is well to see what the law is, and what its workings have always been; for perhaps, the deadliest cup of poison ever put into the hands of sinners is a mixture of law and gospel, calculated to deceive, because it is truth perverted, and to leave the soul in the fatal snare of being neither consciously guilty nor pardoned — neither a sinner nor a saint; thus, blinded by tradition and mere nominal religion, they hasten onward to the great white throne to be judged every man according to their works, where they will, when too late, prove that

as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse (Gal. 3:10).

How very solemn is this!

3. WHAT IS GRACE? —

God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, &c. (Rom. 8:3-5).

Grace is the wondrous love of God in saving man, when a sinner, by the death of His only-begotten Son. Man had been responsible for fulfilling the law, and man must obey; man had sinned, and man must be made a curse; therefore the Son of God became man. God sent forth His Son made of a woman, not in sinful flesh, but in the likeness of sinful flesh; thus the holy and just One could fulfil and suffer, in the stead of the unjust and unholy, so as to bring us to God. Thus the grace of God brings salvation to the chief of sinners. Sin having been condemned in the flesh by the cross, God can justly pardon the sinner; and the Righteous One having fully obeyed unto death for us, we are

made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5:21).

Thus we see that grace was manifested in the cross, by God condemning our sin in His own Son, and making us righteous in Him whom He raised from the dead, thus doing what the law could not do. The work of Christ's cross, then, is the ground of our peace and confidence in God. It is in the cross we see that God is the God of all grace, and that Christ's death is the ground of our life and peace.

"From the cross our hope we draw,

'Tis the sinner's sure resource;

Jesus magnified the law,

Jesus bore its awful curse;

What a joyful truth this is!

Oh, how full of hope it is!"

The grace of God in Christ exactly meets the sinner's necessities. It needs a sinner to display itself upon. A spotless holy angel before the throne may be the subject of Jehovah's love, but cannot taste that the Lord is gracious; it is for man, sinful, rebellious man, that the throne of grace is established. Other creatures of God will behold its wonders, but man realizes eternal redemption through the blood of the Lamb.

“For man, O miracle of grace! For man the Savior bled!”

With regard. to the effects of the grace of God on our souls, eternity itself will only be long enough to unfold; but suffice it to say at present, that grace, not law, gives life and peace, and produces godly walk and conduct. Grace brings life to the dead in trespasses and sins:

I am come,

said Jesus,

that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly (John 10:10).

Or, as elsewhere expressed,

None eye pitied thee, . . . to have compassion upon thee; but thou wast cast out, . . . to the loathing of thy person, in the day that thou wast born. And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, LIVE; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, LIVE (Ezek. 16:5, 6)!

It is life, everlasting life, the soul receives, not by doing, but by believing; not as a future expectation, but as a present blessing:

He that believeth on me hath everlasting life (John 6:47); Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal

life; and I will raise him up at the last day (John 6:54).

This life is Christ in us, and we in Him:

He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in Him (John 6:56).

As we have before seen, grace, not law, is also the sole ground of peace with God; for He hath made peace through the blood of His cross. Hence the order of the apostolic writings is not peace and grace, but grace and peace —

grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied (1 Pet. 1:2).

Those only have the enjoyment of peace with God who are looking simply as the ground of it to the grace of God to us in the death and resurrection of Christ. Many sincere souls have not peace, because they are looking within for it instead of to Christ. Believing the grace of God, we also bring forth the blessed fruits of righteousness, and are led by the Spirit to be imitators of Christ; hence the righteousness of the law (not the law as law, but the righteousness of the law) is fulfilled in us; and more too, because, in following Christ, we go further than the law, though not under it as law. The practical Christian does not break the law; he loves and serves both God and his neighbour. He also follows Jesus inside the rent veil, and worships the Father as standing in grace, and accepted in the Son of His love. He claims not an eye for an eye, or a tooth for a tooth; but returns blessing for cursing, and loves his enemies. Thus, more than the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in those who walk after the Spirit; for their aim is to exalt Christ, and follow Him who has redeemed them with His own blood, fulfilled the law for them, delivered them from condemnation, and given them eternal life.

“Rebels, we broke our Maker’s laws;
He from the threatening set us free —
Bore the full vengeance on the cross,
And nailed the curses to the tree.”

Besides this, we have a higher character of righteousness than if we had perfectly obeyed the law, because Christ Himself is our righteousness — He is made of God unto us righteousness. It is more than legal righteousness imputed to us — it is Divine —

the righteousness which is of God by faith (Phil. 3:9);

thus giving us a standing of completeness before God, a nearness to Himself, that nothing could have given but the sovereign grace of God.

4. Let us now notice some POINTS OF CONTRAST BETWEEN THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL.

(1) The law kept persons at a distance from God. At Sinai, the people were commanded not to go up, or touch the borders of it; whosoever toucheth the mount shall be surely put to death (see Ex. 19:12).

The gospel is a message of
good tidings of great joy (Luke 2:10);
it preaches
forgiveness of sins (Eph. 1:7),
invites men
to come and take the water of life freely (see Rev. 22:17),
and brings the far off nigh to God in Christ, and through His blood.

(2) The law said, Do and live —
this do, and thou shalt live (Luke 10:28);
the gospel says, Believe and live;
I give unto them eternal life (John 10:28).

(3) The law demanded righteousness from man to God in the way of works; the gospel brings righteousness from God to man in the way of faith.

(4) The law required man to love God perfectly; the gospel proclaims God’s
perfect love (1 John 4:18)
to man in his guilt and ruin.

God commendeth His love toward us; in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8).

(5) The law spoke of remembrance of sins without remission; the gospel gives full remission without any remembrance.

Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more (Heb. 8:12).

(6) The law made nothing perfect; the gospel declares that Christ has, by one offering, . . . perfected for ever them that are sanctified (Heb. 10:14).

We might enlarge, but this is enough to show how wide the contrast is between law and grace, and how important it is to

rightly divide the word of truth (see 2 Tim. 2:15).

5. In applying the points we have considered, we may notice, first, a class of persons who, for lack of clear gospel light, have not peace. They see that the law of ten commandments is of God: they put themselves under it, and acknowledge its just claims upon them; they also own that God should be worshipped, and His ordinances attended to. They are conscious of having sinned, but hope, by redoubling their efforts, to attain to some fitness for God. Sometimes they are well pleased with their progress, and at other times the sense of guilt almost overwhelms them. Endeavouring to come up to an imaginary standard of holiness, they live somewhere between hope and despair, only they are astonished that others can speak with confidence of their peace with God and acceptance in Christ. Dear reader! if such is your experience, allow me to say, that you do right in acknowledging the law, and all its stern demands; but it is better to confess your guilt as a transgressor, than go on trying to patch up the old garment. Oh, look at once to Jesus who was crucified; behold Him as the Substitute which God provided to fulfil the law, to bear all its penalties, and give you an everlasting righteousness, in which you can stand justified from all things before Him. You need not hesitate, for God has given you free permission to come; because He says,

Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth (Rom. 10:4).

Thus renouncing your own righteousness, and simply believing what God has done in Christ, you will have peace with God, and will be able to say —

“How long beneath the law I lay,

In bondage and distress!

I toiled the precepts to obey,

But toiled without success.

“To see the law by Christ fulfilled,

And hear His pardoning voice,

Changes a slave into a child,

And duty into choice.”

There is another class of persons who have known peace, and once tasted the blessed liberty of the gospel, but they did not know the deep importance of trying everything by the Scriptures. At length they were spoiled by the traditions of men, and were persuaded to consider it necessary to add something to the finished work of Christ, by way of making their salvation more secure; which they little suspected overturned the great doctrine of justification by faith, and struck at the root of true Christian peace and joy. At last, prayer became irksome, the Scriptures lost their interest, their sense of the liberty of the gospel declined, and, instead of quiet confidence, bondage, perplexity, and fear possessed them, until they doubted their interest in Christ altogether. They departed from the simplicity of Christ, made a law of something, and got under it, though it might not have been exactly the law of Moses. This was the Galatian error, a type, we fear, of a widespread evil in the present day, when many, instead of growing in grace, have turned from the liberty wherewith Christ hath made them free, and become entangled again with the yoke of bondage. If any who read these pages feel that this describes their case, we earnestly exhort you to turn at once to God, acknowledge your folly to Him, and earnestly pray that, by the power of the Holy Ghost, you may have Christ so revealed to you, through the Scriptures, in all His personal glory, fullness, fitness, and offices, as to draw your soul out after Him, and make you so realize the perpetual efficacy of His finished and all- prevailing work, as to give you renewed rest and peace, and fill you with abhorrence at having thought of adding ordinances, or anything else, to make your salvation more secure.

There are others — alas! how many — who seem not exercised either about the law or the gospel. Their thoughts and ways have no reference to God. They are without God; therefore they speak and act as if there were no God, and are consequently alike indifferent about His holy law and His gracious gospel. The world, either in reference to its business, cares, or pleasures, is the all-engrossing topic of conversation, and the great attraction of their hearts; and the elevation of man, instead of God, one of the most powerful means of giving energy and force to their abilities. However, the time is drawing near when Christ Himself will be revealed, as the only Potentate, to whom everything must be brought into subjection; when all those who now despise His laws, and reject His blessed gospel, though perhaps prospering in the world, will be made to feel that He who once died on Calvary’s cross is Lord of all; for

the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day (Isa. 2:17).

Now Christ calls chief sinners, and cleanses the blackest, foulest sins with His precious blood; but then He will judge righteously, and put all enemies under His feet. May God the Holy Ghost solemnly impress these truths on many hearts!

Crossing the Jordan

And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, Come hither and hear the words of the LORD your God. And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that He will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites. Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan. Now therefore take you twelve men out of the tribes of Israel, out of every tribe a man. And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests that bear the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of Jordan, that the waters of Jordan shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above; and they shall stand upon an heap. And it came to pass, when the people removed from their tents, to pass over Jordan, and the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people; and as they that bare the ark were come unto Jordan, and the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water, (for Jordan overfloweth all his banks all the time of harvest,) that the waters which came down from above stood and rose up upon an heap very far from the city Adam, that is beside Zaretan: and those that came down toward the sea of the plain, even the salt sea, failed, and were cut off: and the people passed over right against Jericho. And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan (Josh. 3:9-17).

The scene here described was Israel's last trial in the wilderness. For forty years they had journeyed through the desert; but their last experience, like the first, only proved their own helplessness and entire inability to enter the land by their own works. The green fields and luxuriant hills of the

land flowing with milk and honey (Ex. 3:8, 17; 13:5)

were now in sight, but they could not enter in. The overflowing Jordan rolled before them, and threatened to swallow up with death any who ventured in nature's strength to cross it. But the point was so conclusive, that we are not told that any one even proposed it; but Joshua and all the hosts of Israel are presented to us as standing on the wilderness side of Jordan's overflowing banks in conscious helplessness, and without hope, so far as their own resources were concerned. They again had to find that the law could not bring them into the land, and this lesson they had often bitterly to prove in their experience, though, like ourselves, they were very slow to learn it. It is remarkable how prominently this is brought out at the close of their wilderness course. Only about a year before the scene we are contemplating, those who had so willingly placed themselves under the law, the terms of which were,

This do, and thou shalt live (Luke 10:28),

were dying in all directions from the fiery serpent's bite, which not only shows us that they had not kept the law, but that they were so disobedient as to bring upon themselves the special judgment

of God; so that, instead of having life as the fruit of obedience, deliverance from death could only come to them in the way of grace — the free gift of God. Just before this, the venerable lawgiver, notwithstanding all his previous meekness and faithfulness, so grievously dishonored the Lord, that he could not be allowed to bring the congregation of Israel into the land. (See Num. 20 and 21) Thus we see that the law could neither give them life nor righteousness, but was the ministration of condemnation and death, and that in its working it served to prove the New Testament doctrines,

By the law is the knowledge of sin,

and,

By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in His sight (Rom. 3:20).

And how blessed it is to contemplate that all these failures of man were only occasions for bringing out, in types and shadows, the resources of God's abounding grace, as the realities were afterwards so wondrously manifested in the sufferings, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ! How important, also, it is to notice, in the history of those under the law, that whatever blessing they had, it came to them, not as the fruit of their own worthiness, but only in the way of Divine mercy! If you see them in Egyptian bondage, or exposed to the destroying angel's sword, it is God that shelters and delivers them through the blood of the lamb. When Pharaoh and his host hotly pursued them to the borders of the Red Sea, it was God that wrought deliverance for them, by dividing the waves and heaping them up in a liquid wall, thus bringing them through as on dry land, and cutting off their enemies in judgment. See them again with parched lips murmuring beside Marah's waters; and it was God who directed them to that mystic tree which could make the bitterest water sweet. See them, also, hungry in the barren wilderness, or burning with thirst in a land of drought; and it was God that rained down daily bread from heaven to feed them, and caused the flinty rock to pour forth rivers of water to refresh them. It was God who led them by the right way; it was God who brought the pillar of cloud over them to screen them from the sun's burning rays, and caused the pillar of fire to light up the darkness of the night watches. See them again suffering the due reward of their sins from the fiery serpent's bite; and it was God that brought life to them through the serpent of brass lifted up. See their leader deservedly cut off through transgression; and it was God who raised up Joshua to successfully lead them through every obstacle; and lead them into their promised inheritance. Lastly, see them on Jordan's bank, afresh learning the lesson of being

without strength (Rom. 5:6);

and it is God, the living God, against whom they had so often sinned, that in sovereign grace made a way for them through the river of judgment, and brought them into their long-desired land. All these facts read to us, as they should have to Israel, the happy lessons, that we are saved and blessed solely on the ground of mercy, and

not by works of righteousness which we have done (Titus 3:5).

"Grace, we sing, God's grace through Jesus;

Grace, the spring of peace to man;

Grace, that from each sorrow frees us;

Grace, too high for thought to scan;

Grace, the theme of God's own love,

Grace, the theme all themes above."

In order to get a clear understanding of the instruction of Israel's crossing the Jordan, we must endeavour to divest ourselves of the commonly received idea, that it is a type of the Christian's experience in the article of death. The mistake has most likely arisen from not seeing that the gospel brings to us a present salvation, and that each believer is spoken of in the Scriptures as one who

HATH everlasting life,

and

is passed from death unto life (John 5:24).

From not seeing this, some think of death as before them instead of behind them, and that which they have

passed from.

Hence some speak of daily "dipping their foot in Jordan," that is, being daily exercised about death. A friend of mine once visited a sick Christian, who was much distressed about how she could "cross the Jordan"; and we have heard of others who commonly speak of death as "crossing the Jordan." The fact is, that we who believe are in Christ delivered from death, and made partakers of a risen life, by the death and resurrection of Christ; the blood of Jesus has removed the sting of death, and though we may fall asleep in Jesus, it is not death, strictly speaking; for Jesus said,

It a man keep my saying, he shall never see death (John 8:51).

That Israel crossing the Jordan cannot refer to this is clear, because when they crossed the river they began to fight; whereas, when we

sleep in Jesus (1 Thess. 4:14),

all our fighting is over; we put off our battle garments for ever; we exchange an helmet for a crown, and our conflict for rest.

But what does this scene at Jordan mean? It means that deliverance from death, and that spiritual resurrection which we have now, through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Our state by nature is that of being dead in trespasses and sins — children of wrath — exposed to death and judgment. But God, in marvelous grace, quickens or makes alive dead ones, and those who are so quickened are made nigh to God, delivered from death, and the wrath to come; they have been quickened together, raised up together, and made sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Israel's crossing the Jordan, therefore, sets before us the blessed doctrine, that God's children have died with Christ, have been buried with Christ, are risen with Christ, and made sit together in heavenly

places in Christ Jesus. Thus we are, as to position, in heavenly places, while actually we are walking in an evil world. But let us now look more particularly at the Scripture before us.

1. ISRAEL'S STATE, as we have before noticed, was one of helplessness. Moreover, the fear of death filled their minds; for Jordan with overflowing banks was between them and the promised land. They could not see how they could enter into their much-desired inheritance. And is not this exactly what all feel whose consciences are roused to consider their eternal state? They cannot think of heaven, and glory, and fullness of joy, without feeling that they are exposed to death; and they seem to view glory afar off, and know not how to reach it. Their consciences accuse them of sin against God, and they fear death as the consequence —

The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23).

They recoil from death, and tremble at its expectation. A death-bed scene makes them quiver, because they dread it for themselves. No one can write or speak on such a solemn subject without the greatest seriousness; yet if the truth of God assures me that Christ has abolished death, and delivered me from it, ought I not to be at peace? Death abases man's pride, it prostrates in the dust earth's most honored sons, it brings down man's loftiest thoughts, and hurls into oblivion all his vain pretensions. Man's inventions and appliances are made to meet almost every other requirement; but in regard to "the king of terrors," as he calls death, he is obliged to content himself with perfuming or smoothing a dying pillow, and garnishing the grave; but death he must bow to — death Christ only has overcome. It is death and judgment that men dread, because conscience accuses; therefore they are without God, and have no hope in the world. Of course, Satan seeks to fill the eye and heart of men with

the pleasures of sin (Heb. 11:25);

but a Divinely-convicted soul cannot rest until he is delivered from the fear of death, and enabled to sing —

"My sin is gone — my fears are o'er —

I shun God's presence now no more;

He sits upon a throne of grace;

He bids me boldly seek His face;

Sprinkled upon the throne of God,

I see that rich atoning blood!"

2. Now look at GOD'S WAY OF DELIVERANCE. God showed by this that He could bring His people through death and into resurrection. It is the voice of Jesus in Old Testament times that here says,

I am the resurrection, and the life (John 11:25).

Joshua said unto the children of Israel,

Come hither, and hear the words of the LORD your God. . .

. . Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among, you.

. . . . Behold, the ark of the covenant of the God of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan. Now therefore take you twelve men out of the tribes of Israel, out of every tribe a man. And it shall come to pass, that as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests . . . shall rest in the waters of Jordan, that the waters of Jordan shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above; and they shall stand up upon an heap (Josh. 3:9-13).

Thus we see that the waters of judgment fled before the ark of the covenant,
a new and living way (Heb. 10:20)

was made for the people, and they were delivered from death and its terrors, and at once enabled to enter the land. It was all of God — His wisdom, His power, His grace; and is a vivid illustration of the well known text,

By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast (Eph. 2:8, 9).

On referring to the construction of the ark in Ex. 25, and its use as recorded in Num. 10:33, we cannot fail to recognize that Christ is prefigured by it. As the ark of the covenant

going before into Jordan, and resting in the waters of Jordan (see Josh. 3:11, 13),

made the way for Israel to enter the land, so it is by Jesus going into death that

He destroyed death, and him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and delivered them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage (see Heb. 2:14, 15).

Does not this clearly show that we have deliverance from death only by the death of Christ? Does it not magnify the work of the cross, and plainly point us to Christ crucified as

the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6)?

Does it not tell us that there is

none other name under heaven whereby we can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ (see Acts 4:10, 12)?

Does not the Holy Ghost here teach us that we have died with Christ, by His having died for us? And do not our souls cry out while contemplating the cross of Christ, and His triumphant resurrection,

O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:55, 56).

Oh, how blessed is the remembrance of the fact, that the holy and spotless Jesus went into the cold waters of death for us, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God. It is the death of Christ alone that removes the sting of death from us, and enables us to find access with confidence into God's presence. We know that, when Christ died; the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom, to show us that through His death every hindrance was removed to the believer's

coming into the presence of God.

3. CROSSING THE JORDAN we may look upon as the action of faith on God's way of deliverance. Believing that the living God had made this way, this living way, into the land, they all passed clean over (see Josh. 3:17).

Their eyes rested on the ark in the river for them, and the wondrous power of that ordinance in delivering from the waters of death, and opening the way into the land. They beheld the liquid wall on the one hand, that the waters failed on the other,

the ark of the covenant (Josh. 3:17)

being in the midst, and a straight path made for them to pass over dry shod. Thus they were inspired with confidence, all fear and doubt were removed, and onward they went according to the word of the Lord, and quickly planted their feet upon their promised inheritance, the land flowing with milk and honey. And so it is now. It is a believing view of the death of Christ, the knowledge of His having died for us — of the curse, and wrath, and death, which we deserved, having fallen on Him instead of us — that He was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification — thus seeing the wondrous love of God in providing such a Savior, and accomplishing such a work for us, that fills us with confidence, delivers us from guilt and fear, and enables us to find rest and peace in the holiest of all, in the presence of God Himself. Knowing that the risen Jesus has entered into heaven itself with His own blood, now to appear before the face of God for us, we follow Him in there by faith, and know our blessed liberty as blood-washed worshipers in His presence. Therefore in Christ, and by His blood, we who were once afar off are made nigh; and we, who were once dead in sins, have been quickened together, raised up together, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Our standing, then, is heavenly, we are brought into the heavenlies in Christ, we are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places; death is behind us, glory before us, and our expectation is to bear the heavenly image; heaven is our home.

Our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body (Phil. 3:20, 21).

Our worship therefore is heavenly; we come boldly to

the throne of grace (Heb. 4:16),

having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience; and, as a heavenly people,

risen with Christ (Col. 3:1),

we are exhorted to seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God; to set our

affection on things above, not on things on the earth (Col. 3:2),

because our

life is hid with Christ in God (Col. 3:3).

It is most important for the believer to see that he not only has forgiveness of sins, but that he is risen with Christ, and belongs to the heavenlies; that he is a partaker of the heavenly calling, a heaven-born, heaven-bound son, having life, resurrection-life, and, by the Holy Ghost, union with the glorified Son of God — a member of Christ's body, of His flesh and of His bones. Not like the earthly people of Israel, who were called from Egypt to an earthly land of promise; but called from a state of death in trespasses and sins to heavenly places — an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away. The blood of our sacrifice not sprinkled again and again on a brazen altar, but presented once and for ever in heaven itself. Not having a dying priest to minister in an earthly sanctuary, but having a priest for ever in heaven to make intercession for us. Thus we are not of the world, but knowing its doom, and that the earth and all things therein will be burned up, we find our peace and blessing in heaven, inside the veil, and that

our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3).

These things, known in the soul by the teaching of the Holy Ghost as God's eternal truth, answer a thousand perplexing questions, and plainly mark out for us a path of heavenly-mindedness in a self-seeking, Christ-rejecting world.

4. Lastly, let us look at ISRAEL IN THE LAND. We are repeatedly told that they clean passed over, and the waters again returned to their place as before, which facts speak solemn and comforting lessons to our hearts. The people now lived in the promised land. God gave it to them, and brought them into it dry shod. They were no longer in the desert of drought and barrenness, but in the land flowing with milk and honey, where grapes and pomegranates abounded. The way which God brought them was never to be forgotten; therefore they were to

take twelve stones out of the middle of Jordan, and carry them over with them into the place where they lodged, for a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever . . . and they are there unto this day (Josh. 4:3-8)

so that ages and generations to come should know the exceeding goodness of God to them. (Compare Josh. 4:4-24 with Eph. 2:7.) And so in ages to come the Church shall be to the praise and glory of God, for His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. We shall ever remember the cross. It is the death of Christ we specially remember in the Lord's Supper — we

shew the Lord's death till He come (1 Cor. 11:26).

We do not keep the Lord's supper in order to be saved, but we do it in remembrance of Him, by whose stripes we are healed, by whose death we have life.

We may next notice that the people of Israel, when in the land, were circumcised according to the Lord's command. This teaches us that a realization of our heavenly calling and standing in Christ will be connected with self-judgment, and practically putting off the old man and his deeds; we shall reckon ourselves to have died unto sin, and to be alive unto God through Jesus Christ. Hence heavenly worship and rejoicing in Christ Jesus will be associated with having no confidence in the flesh. Circumcision was not practised in the wilderness, which shows us typically that trials and necessities do not give us power over self; hence those Christians who are pressed down with the cares and difficulties of the way will have little power to keep under the flesh; whereas those who know the portion which

perfect love (1 John 4:18)

has given them in a risen and ascended Savior will judge the flesh to be unfit for God's service, and as unclean in its moral or religious actings as in its grosser workings. We may be assured that abiding in Christ in heavenly places is the secret of true humility.

"The more Thy glory strikes mine eyes,

The humbler I shall lie;

For while I sink, my joys shall rise

Immeasurably high."

The people also kept the passover; and oh, with what rejoicing they must have celebrated it! (Josh. 5:10). They must have valued the blood of the lamb more than ever, when they remembered where it had brought them, as well as what it had delivered them from. And who estimates the redeeming love of God, and the unutterable preciousness of the blood of Christ, like those who know it, as not only blotting out their sin, but as enabling them to enter with boldness into the holiest of all!

We next notice that the manna ceased, and

the people did eat of the old corn in the land (see Josh. 5:11, 12).

This is very significant. In days of wilderness experience, the people were fed by that which came down from heaven; but when in the land they fed and lived upon that which sprung up from the corn of wheat that died. So now those who may be trusting in the blood of the Lamb, who have merely a wilderness experience, will be sustained by the limited, though most blessed, thought of Christ having descended; but those who know their full deliverance from death, and standing in life and righteousness in heavenly places in Christ, find their joy and strength in the blessed knowledge, that

He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things (Eph. 4:10).

They live on resurrection food, on Christ risen, Christ exalted, Christ the abolisher of death, Christ crowned with glory and honor, Christ our Lamb and Priest now in the presence of God for us, Christ our Lord, Head, righteousness, and life, Christ soon coming to take us unto Himself, that where He is, there we may be also.

But though God gave them the land and brought them there, they had to fight the fight of faith to keep it. So we have to

put on the whole armour of God (Eph. 6:11)

to maintain the consciousness and joy of our heavenly standing. Satan and his host only consult to cast us down from our excellency, and we need divine strength, and divine armour, to wrestle with principalities and powers, to enable us to maintain in our soul's our conscious standing in the blessing God has given us and brought us into in Christ Jesus in heavenly places.

May the Lord bless His own truth!

Now Made Nigh; or, What the Christian Was, and What He Is

But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ (Eph. 2:13).

In reading the word of God, it is always important to see to whom each particular portion is addressed. For instance, this epistle was not addressed to the inhabitants of Ephesus generally, but to the saints and faithful brethren — those who had known and believed the love that God hath to us; those among the Ephesians who had, through faith in the Lord Jesus, been brought nigh to God — had passed from death unto life. The apostle was inspired by the Holy Ghost to address them in the remembrance of what they had been, as well as to instruct them as to the character of their present standing and blessing as redeemed and accepted in the Beloved.

We do not become Christians by being born of Christian parents, or because our lot has been cast in what is called a Christian country, or because we have been religiously educated, or by attending to any outward ordinances, or by being associated with any who are truly saints of God. No; we only become Christians by having to do with Christ and His atoning blood. Whatever may have been our previous history or character, we are far from God, and enemies to God, till we are reconciled to God by the death His Son. If I were asked to give, in a few words of Scripture, the true definition of what a Christian is, I do not think I could give a better reply than we find in the latter part of this verse, viz., one who was

far off

but is now in Christ

made nigh (Eph. 2:13)

to God by His blood.

We find in this verse reference made to what the state of these persons was before they received the gospel, their present standing and blessing, and also the ground of their being so. Let us look a little at each of these points.

1. WHAT THEY WERE —

far off.

As fallen creatures in Adam, men are naturally found in a place of distance from God. After sin entered, Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. And we see also in Cain their son, that he went out from the presence of the Lord, and sought to gratify himself by building a city, &c. And so it is now; man's birth-condition, his habits and educational pursuits, are all at a distance from God; he still tries to hide himself from God's presence, and to be happy, if he can,

afar off (Eph. 2:17).

These Ephesians, however, though belonging to a highly-polished city, were Gentiles, not having any of the privileges, or even the measure of knowledge, that the Jews had; they were heathens, idolaters, taken up only with this present evil world — the fashions of the world, the honors of the world, its wealth, patronage, and advancement, filled their hearts. From the rude lusts of the flesh, to the more refined desires of the mind, they were shaping their course according to the dictates of Satan, the prince of this world. They knew of nothing higher than pleasing themselves, gratifying their own wills and inclinations; in a word, to eat, drink, and sleep, as if there were no God. They might have ranked among the most civilized, polished, and benevolent of the age; they might have been outwardly more moral and orderly than their neighbours; still they were without God, and having no hope in the world. They were in the world, and of the world, which lieth in the wicked one, and therefore far off from God.

Such was the character of the world in the days of the apostle, and such is the world now. Such was the state of the Ephesians then, and such is the state of many now. Nothing can be more distinct than the spirit of the world, and the spirit of true Christianity. The moving principle of the world is the endeavour to be happy, apart from God and the Savior — far off; the spirit of true Christianity leads us to be happy only in God's presence, and that which honors Him. The principles of the world, whether their tendencies are moral or immoral, are always outside God's presence. Those who are of the world weigh not their motives and actions before God; they know not His love; therefore they live not for His glory. The advancement of man's interest, the cultivation of human intellect, and the exaltation of natural abilities, with the vain endeavour to find rest and satisfaction far from God and Christ, is what the world is mostly made up of. Is it not so? Turn where we may, do we not find men busily seeking satisfaction apart from God? some in pleasure, others in science, fame, the accumulation of wealth, or other forms of self-indulgence. Such, I say, is the world; and I dwell upon it, because few appear to see that the world, whether in its rude or polished phase, is equally that which is far from God.

Moreover, with all the outward glitter, such have within them a secret dread of God's presence; like Adam, they may truthfully say,

I was afraid, . . . and I hid myself (Gen. 3:10).

That which keeps men

far off

is the dread of being near to God. Such is the wicked character of sin, that the carnal mind is not only at enmity and rebellion against God, but it leads men to shrink away from the light of His presence: hence they fear death, not because of the painful moment of separation between soul and body, but because of the dread of appearing before the Majesty of heaven. They fear judgment, because they fear being banished into outer darkness. They have no peace, because they know not the virtue of that precious blood which cleanses from all sin; and they try to banish these thoughts from their minds, by seeking a sphere for their energies and amusements outside the presence of God. It was here the Ephesians were when the gospel reached them; they were dead in trespasses and sins, afar off, having no hope, and without God in the world; and such is the state of many now.

2. Let us now consider what they were when the apostle addressed this epistle to them. He tells them that they are now

in Christ Jesus,

and

made nigh (Eph. 2:13). In Christ Jesus;

that is, no longer regarded by God in a state of death as connected with Adam, but as having passed from death unto life. As Noah formerly entered into the ark, as the only place of safety from the coming judgments, so they had taken refuge in Christ Jesus; and as Noah was shut into the ark by God, so such are preserved in Christ Jesus. They had life and righteousness in Christ, and union with Christ, having been quickened together, raised up together, and made to sit together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus. This was their present portion —

now in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:13).

Under no condemnation, because they were in Christ Jesus; having eternal life, because in Christ Jesus; united to Him by the Holy Ghost, who is on the other side of death; risen with Christ, and seated in Him in the heavenlies. Such is the standing and security that the God of grace has given us in Christ Jesus. They were thus made nigh in Christ, as well as through His blood. How vast the change! Such no longer dread God's presence, but love it supremely. They do not fear death, but know, through Christ, victory over it. They do not tremble at the thought of judgment, because they know that Christ endured the judgment and penalty their sins had merited. God Himself is their spring of life and peace; they are only truly happy when near Him.

Their former enmity against God has been subdued by His redeeming love. The hardness of their hearts has been melted by the contemplation of Immanuel's cross, and their self-will and self-love have been overcome by the exceeding riches of the grace of God in Christ. They know that they are made nigh to God.

Their nearness to God is one of the most perfect friendship. It is thus their privilege to seek His counsel in every difficulty, to trust in Him at all times, to reckon upon His help in every adversity, and to bring them through every danger. This nearness to God is one of the dearest and tenderest relationships — that of children.

Beloved, now are we the sons of God (1 John 3:2).

So that we may come before God as our Father, and count upon His care over us, His providential kindness, His paternal sympathy, His watchful eye, His almighty arm. It is our privilege to appeal to His fatherly heart for all we require, under all circumstances, whether temporal or spiritual; for

as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are dust (Psa. 103:13, 14).

We are a heavenly people of the

household of God (Eph. 2:19),

and are called to serve and honor Him in all the filial nearness and devotedness of sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty.

But more than this, we are made nigh to God as worshipers. We are not now afraid to come near the presence of the Almighty, but have liberty to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus; there to present our spiritual sacrifices as a royal and holy priesthood, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

And all this our God has done for us in Christ. What love! Is Christ near to God? so am I, for I am in Him, Is Christ living for evermore? so am I. Is Christ righteous? so am I; for in Him, and through His blood, I am made nigh to God. What matchless grace! Oh for a believing heart fully to welcome all these ways of our God toward us, that instead of brooding over ourselves with gloom and sorrow, we may find our hearts lifted high, and more and more expanded by the heights and depths of God's free and abundant love to us in Christ Jesus.

"By nature and by practice far,

How very far, from God!

Yet now by grace brought nigh to Him,

Through faith in Jesus' blood.

"So nigh, so very nigh to God,

Nearer I cannot be;

For in the person of His Son

I am as near as He.

"So dear, so very dear to God,

More dear I cannot be;

The love wherewith He loves His Son —

Such is His love to me."

3. THE GROUND OF ALL THIS BLESSING is the blood of Christ —

made nigh by the blood of Christ (Eph. 2:13).

Not our efforts, our devotedness, our attainments, but the blood of Christ. It is something already done — we may not know it, may fail in the true apprehension of it, may not enjoy it, nevertheless it is done —

ARE made nigh by the blood of Christ.

Without the death of the Son of God, we must for ever have remained far off from Him, still in our sins and guilt, for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul; and Jesus taught the absolute necessity of His death, for He said,

Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit (John 12:24).

It is not, then, the incarnation of Christ, the life of Christ, or the example of Christ, but the death of Christ, the cross of Christ, the blood of Christ, that cleanses our guilty consciences, and makes us feel happy in God's presence. It is Christ crucified that is the only peaceful meeting-place between God and the sinner. There God shows sinners how much He loves them. There God brings salvation to the lost. There God opened an all-cleansing fountain for sin and uncleanness. There God magnified His own holiness and justice, and manifested the exceeding riches of His grace to unholy men; and now in Christ Jesus, by His blood, God has made all that believe to stand in everlasting nearness to Himself.

We have redemption through the blood of Christ, even the forgiveness of sins, because God made Him, who knew no sin, to be sin for us. Our sins were laid upon Him, and He was made a curse for us. In this way He suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. The wrath of God was thus poured out upon Him instead of us, so that

He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed (Isa. 53:5).

Hence, on the ground of strictest justice and holiness, God can speak of us as a redeemed people, washed from our sins in the blood of Jesus, and that our sins and iniquities He will remember no more. The alone ground, therefore, of forgiveness of sins is not our works, our experience, our frames, or our feelings, but the blood of Christ; for without the shedding of blood is no remission; and the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin. Nothing therefore relieves man's guilt and fears, or removes the burden from the conscience, or speaks peace to a sin-convicted soul, but

THE BLOOD OF CHRIST.

O my soul, I charge thee ever to remember that it is alone by the blood of the cross that thy scarlet sins have been purged, and that thou art whiter than snow!

"Great God of wonders! all Thy ways

Display Thine attributes Divine;

But the fair glories of Thy GRACE

Beyond Thine other wonders shine.

Who is a pardoning God like Thee?

Or who has grace so rich and free?"

We are also justified by the blood —

being now justified by His blood (Rom. 5:9).

The cross of Christ not only speaks to us of sins being judged and put away, but it also shows us One who was perfectly obedient, who surrendered His whole self to the will of God, wholly

consecrated Himself to Him, was

obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Phil. 2:8).

Thus the work of Christ Jesus was infinitely meritorious in God's sight; for there a whole burnt-offering was presented to God, by which we could stand accepted and righteous in all the perfectness of the offering for ever. Jesus was thus accepted for us, and we are made accepted in Him. It is by the death of Christ that we are reconciled to God, and in Him we are

made the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21).

For while that blood by which Jesus entered into heaven itself speaks to us of sins for ever put away, it also tells us of an everlasting worthiness, or righteousness, in which His people stand accepted and complete, even in Him who is risen from the dead, and the Head of all principality and power.

We are also sanctified by the blood — consecrated, or set apart for God.

Jesus, . . . that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate (Heb. 13:12).

As sprinkled with that blood, we are able to serve God as not our own but His, and are thus taught that we are set apart for His service, not in order to be saved, but because we are saved; not in order to be His, but because we are His. The priests of old, after the offering of the sin-offering and burnt-offering, were sprinkled with the blood of the ram of consecration, and anointed with oil, to qualify them for priestly service. The tip of their right ear, and the thumb of their right hand, and the great toe of their right foot, were all marked with blood, to teach us that, because we are redeemed by the blood of Jesus, we are to listen to God's voice, to walk in His ways, and minister in His holy service; that, as an accepted, consecrated, blood-sprinkled, and anointed priesthood, we are set apart to serve God, to worship God, to glorify Him in our bodies and in our spirits, because we are not our own, but His.

It is, then, the precious blood of Christ, as sprinkled on the mercy-seat by our great High Priest, that is our simple way of approaching God at all times: we enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus. When we experience a difficulty in entering into God's presence, it is because we have forgotten the blood, unless there be sin on the conscience unconfessed. But drawing near to God through the blood of His beloved Son, believing God's testimony to the value of that blood, and what it has done for us, we can then, in the bright light and glory of His infinitely holy presence, pour out our hearts before Him, praise and magnify the unsearchable riches of Divine love, seek all we need at His hand, and not hesitate to search our hearts, and try our ways before Him, because He witnesses to us there that the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.

"That rich atoning blood,

Which on the throne we see,

Provides for those who come to God

An all-prevailing plea."

Well, then, might the apostle say to the believers at Ephesus,

Now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ (Eph. 2:13).

Once they were in the world, and of the world; but now they are not of the world, even as Jesus was not of the world. Once enemies to God, now friends. Once children of disobedience, now children of God. Once afar off, but now in Christ made nigh by His blood.

Oh that God's dear children did know their nearness to God, their standing and completeness in Christ, their privileges, their present blessings, their deliverance from the guilt and power of sin, their rescue from this present evil world, its ways and maxims, by THE BLOOD OF CHRIST!

My reader, where are you at this moment? Are you still living and walking according to the course of this world? Do its pleasures, honors, fashions, and its so-called progress, or its falsely-called science, absorb your heart and mind? We cannot serve two masters. It must be either God or mammon, Christ or the world; which is it with you? Sure I am that believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was crucified for sinners, will give you peace, and bring you nigh to God. It is vain to look elsewhere; for the God of truth declares that there is salvation in no other: for there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ.

Have You Peace?

Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment (Eccl. 9:7, 8).

Many exercised souls have not peace. We hope that God's Spirit is working with them, yet they have not found peace. If you ask them, they will tell you that they get worse and worse, and find themselves further from peace than ever. They say they can sometimes look to Jesus, but have not peace. Why have they not peace? Because they have not believed that Jesus so completely saves every sinner that comes to Him, that He says,

Go thy way; thy faith hath saved thee: go in peace (see Mark 5:34; Luke 7:50).

Blessed be His dear name, Jesus still says, Come! Come unto me! He still looks with an eye of pity on poor sinners. He still says,

Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book (Rev. 22:10);

and almost the last of the sayings is,

Let Him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely (Rev. 22:17).

To the believer He says, Go thy way. Doubt no more. Be happy. Go in peace. Sometimes a sin-burdened soul came to Jesus. One woman cast herself down at His feet in deep sorrow of heart; she so felt her sinfulness, and that Christ was the Savior of such, that big tears rolled down her cheeks, and washed His blessed feet, and she wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thus she came as an unworthy, sinful one to Jesus; and He said to her, You are saved; go in peace! With open arms of love and mercy, He said to a sin-oppressed people,

Come unto me, . . . and I will give you rest (Matt. 11:28).

Some did come, and then He said,

Go in peace (Mark 5:34; Luke 7:50).

The Lord Jesus came to seek and save the lost. He will save; none other can save. If you do not come to Him, you will never find peace. You may go to church or chapel, say prayers, and the like, but these will not give you peace. Jesus is the only peace-maker between God and man, the only peace-giver; hence He is called the Prince of peace. Some of you may think you have peace, because you do not feel particularly unhappy; but it is not so. If you awoke at midnight, and found your bedroom brilliantly illuminated, above any brightness you ever beheld, you would tremble, you would fear and dread, lest the Lord were come, because you have not peace with God. When you place a friend in the grave, and think how soon you may be laid there yourself, you are not happy — you have not peace. Why? Because you have not come to the Lord Jesus, and been reconciled to God by His death. You have no peace, because you will not come to Jesus. The vilest sinner may come. Publicans and harlots do come, and Jesus washes their crimson sins in

His blood, and says to them, Go in peace! Nothing can be more simple. It was not the woman's tears that we have referred to, nor her humility, nor anything else of her own that saved her. No; she simply came to Jesus as a helpless sinner, and He saved her. Some people are constantly thinking or talking about their sins, and say they are always coming to Christ as miserable sinners; they have not peace, because they do not believe God's word, which says that they are now justified by Christ's blood. Other true-hearted people have not peace, because they expect some extraordinary visitation; they say, If I had a particular dream, or heard an angel's voice proclaim that I was saved, I should have peace. But they should not thus speak. Our ears may deceive us; but we have God's word, His unfailing truth, the promise of Him to rest in, with whom is no variableness nor shadow of turning. He declares that He will save to the uttermost them that come to Him through Christ; and this should be enough. Here is a rock for coming sinners to rest upon, solid ground for peace and happiness; for Go thy way! go in peace! are the words of Jesus now to such. But how fearful is the thought that He will say to others by and by,

Depart from me, ye cursed (Matt. 25:41)!

Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 22:13).

Now God — the God of peace — preaches peace by Jesus Christ. All that He wants of sinners is, that they come to Him about their sins; for He gave His Son to put away our sins with His own blood. The Holy Spirit shews men their sinfulness, and leads them to the Lord Jesus Christ, who was crucified, as the only ground of peace. Come, then, now. Come as sinners, miserable, wretched sinners, and come trusting in the atoning work of Jesus. God has sent His truth, and it has been rejected; His servants have been persecuted and put to death; many of the apostles were martyred; still God saves sinners that come to Him by His beloved Son. Some may say, You must do this good work, or that. But Scripture says salvation is not by works, but by believing on Christ Jesus; for God will have mercy, and not sacrifice. Those who thus come to Him are washed in the blood of Jesus, reconciled to God, and able to serve Him acceptably. There must be reconciliation between parties, even if enmity exists only on one side, before there can be acceptable service rendered, or peaceful intercourse known between them. The Queen of this land could not accept the homage and service of a rebel and traitor. No; however much she may wish it, the past transgressions must be first justly dealt with, before such an one would be allowed an audience by her Majesty. How much more the thrice holy God, before whom the heavens are not clean! Oh the blessedness of having to do with the God of peace, whose own arm, instead of being lifted up for our utter destruction, has brought reconciliation, acceptance, and eternal salvation to us!

The first words of these verses,

Go thy way,

have suggested these thoughts. God accepts the person, and therefore his works. He cannot accept the works and not the person; for

the prayer (sacrifice) of the wicked is an abomination in His sight (see Prov. 15:8).

But those whom God accepts may well rejoice, because He now not only accepts their persons, but also their works —

God now accepteth thy works (Eccl. 9:7).

There are three points more in this Scripture that I would like to touch a little upon, as the Lord may graciously help.

1. The believer is called to rejoice.
2. To be watchful.
3. To savour of Christ.

1. THE BELIEVER IS CALLED TO REJOICE.

Eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart (Eccl. 9:7).

He is not to doubt that his sins are forgiven, and that he is accepted in the Beloved, but to be happy in the knowledge of these things. Believing the truth of God, he is assured that he is not condemned — will not come into judgment, but that he is a child of God — has passed from death unto life, and will never perish; because Christ has died and rose again, and entered into heaven itself with His own blood. He stands as a pardoned sinner, accepted and born again of the Spirit; therefore God now accepts his works. He is, then, to eat and drink with joy. He is to take up the necessary matters of every-day life with a happy heart, as unto the Lord. He is to rejoice evermore; in everything to give thanks; yea, to rejoice in the Lord alway. This is true Christian experience, what the apostle Peter calls,

Joy unspeakable and full of glory (1 Pet. 1:8).

But when we find “bread” and “wine” mentioned in Scripture, we may generally be pretty sure that the Holy Spirit is reminding us of Him who said,

I am the bread of life: . . . the bread that I will give is my flesh (John 6:35, 51);

for Christ is the Christian's food. It is broken bread. As we cannot partake of a loaf of bread for our bodily sustenance till it is broken; so we could not eat of Christ, the bread of life, till His body was broken; therefore Jesus said, prior to the cross, the bread that I will give. It is the broken body and poured out blood of Christ that is now our bread and wine; and perhaps the greatest blessing we can have, next to salvation, is a good appetite for the flesh and blood of Christ. Nothing can compensate the believer for a lack of this. Christ is our daily bread. No Christ, no food. We are blessed in Christ with all spiritual blessings, and are called to live on Him for constant spiritual supplies. When meditating on the written word, under the Spirit's teaching, we feed on Christ. We know nothing of Christ, but as revealed unto us by the Spirit in the Scriptures.

The words that I speak unto you,

said Jesus,

they are Spirit, and they are life (John 6:63).

We feed on Christ when we receive His word by faith into our hearts. Hence it is that those who neglect the reading of the Scriptures have barrenness of soul. In this, as in every other thing, Christ hath left us an example. He emptied Himself, and took a servant's form. He lived in continual dependence on the Father; therefore He said,

As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me (John 6:57).

Communion with God, in the person, work, and fullness of Christ, as accepted worshipers, made nigh by His blood, gives true Christian joy. A believer must know something of these things for abiding happiness and joy. So long as he feels outside the vail, not near to God, not in His blessed presence, he will not be happy; but when the blessed Comforter shows him that he is now standing in Christ, inside the vail, cleansed by the blood of Christ, and accepted in Him, with every provision made for the wilderness journey, then it is that he eats his bread with joy, and drinks the soul-cheering wine of the banqueting-house with a merry heart.

How is it that God's dear children do not more rejoice? Because they are not believing the precious words of Christ, not living upon Christ, not feeding on Christ, not drawing out of the fullness of Christ, not apprehending their acceptance and standing in Christ, not abiding in Christ, not dwelling within the vail where Christ our life is, not having communion with God in the flesh and blood of His beloved Son. Hence passing things too much occupy the mind, painful circumstances quickly cast down our spirits, pleasant things easily elate us, and our affections are drawn from those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Oh, my fellow-Christians! let us look away unto Jesus, cleave to the Lord Jesus; let us hold fast our blessed privileges in Him, let us eat our bread with joy, and drink our wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth our works!

2. THE BELIEVER SHOULD BE WATCHFUL.

Let thy garments be always white (Eccl. 9:8).

The garments of salvation are pure and spotless. The robe of Christ is white and clean. The world through which our wilderness journey lies is unclean and defiling, and our evil flesh is easily acted on by Satan; hence we are admonished to keep our garments unspotted (Jude 23). If our children were attired in white and costly garments, and we sent them to walk along a muddy road, we should doubtless charge them to be careful how they walked, and to be watchful lest they defiled their clothing. So our heavenly Father, having put on us

the best robe (Luke 15:22),

tells us that the world through which we walk is evil, and lying in the wicked one, and charges us to be watchful, so that our garments may be always white. Ah, my friends, we have great need to watch and pray, lest we enter into temptation. The defiling world is terribly ensnaring, fleshly lusts are very deceitful, and Satan is a mighty deceiver; so that we need to watch. Jesus always kept unspotted garments. He resisted every temptation, and quenched every fiery dart of Satan. He never sat in the scorner's chair; He always rejected the counsel of the ungodly. No one on earth ever so loved sinners, and yet He was

separate from sinners (Heb. 7:26).

The world could never force an entrance into His heart, so that He could truly say,

I am not of the world (John 17:14, 16).

From first to last, at all times, and under all circumstances, He kept His garments unspotted.

He knew no sin (see 2 Cor. 5:21).

But we, alas! even the most watchful of us, have to mourn over our defiled garments. It is, indeed, too true. They do get spotted, they are not always white. In unguarded moments we fail, and are defiled. But even here again the grace of God meets us, and our tears of sorrow and regret are wiped away by the uplifted hands of our great High Priest; and our sighs are hushed by the still small voice of our Heavenly Father, assuring us that,

if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

He tells us of the perpetual efficacy of the blood, and the all-prevailing character of the priesthood of Christ in maintaining our conscious nearness to God; and while reminding us of His holiness in commanding us to

sin not

His grace assures us that

if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous (1 John 2:1).

Thus, by the contemplation of the Lord Jesus Christ, our communion is restored, our defiled consciences are purged, our garments are cleansed, and we realize again that we have white raiment, though surrounded by an evil-and defiling world.

We are called to walk with God; therefore we should be watchful, lest we slide away and fall from our high places. We should be watchful, lest we forget our standing in Christ, and be found again trying to feed upon carnal husks at the swine-trough. We should be watchful, lest our eye rest upon the world's vain glitter, and our hearts become attracted to it. We should be watchful, lest we yield to evil suggestions, and give utterance to unholy words. We should be watchful, lest we lay down the shield of faith, and slumber in the arms of unbelief. We should be watchful, lest we lose our relish for the sincere milk of the word. We should watch against everything that hinders our rejoicing in the Lord. In a word, we should seek to keep our garments unspotted: but when defilement is contracted, we should at once, with confession, bring it to God our Father, and believe that the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin (1 John 1:9). May we be diligent; so that when Jesus comes we may be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless!

3. THE BELIEVER SHOULD SAVOUR OF CHRIST.

Let thy head lack no ointment (Eccl. 9:8).

Some people of the world do not consider themselves full dressed, unless they have perfumed themselves with some pleasant odour, and wherever they go they leave traces of the sweet scent. So the true Christian is not only made the righteousness of God in Christ; but he is anointed with the Holy Ghost —

Ye have an unction from the Holy One (1 John 2:20).

Hence he is called to witness for Christ, to show forth the virtues of Christ, to confess Christ. As he yields to fleshly lusts, so the Spirit which dwelleth in him is grieved or quenched, and then there will be little of Christ. It is because of this that many talk so much about Christianity with scarcely any reference to Christ; that some preach a long discourse, and if Christ be named at all, He is only briefly referred to at the close; and others write upon religious subjects with Christless pages. If such are really God's people, it is because their heads lack ointment; they are living in fleshly energy instead of in dependence on God the Holy Ghost. The apostle Paul bids us beware of every thing which is not after Christ (Col. 2:8); and our Lord said,

Whosoever shall CONFESS ME before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God. But he that DENIETH ME before men shall be denied before the angels of God (Luke 12:8, 9).

Nothing can more plainly show us, that it is not religious things or opinions to which we are called upon to give testimony, but to Christ — Christ in the infinite perfections of His person, work, worth, and coming. Paul and others, through grace, kept so close to Christ, that the savour of His knowledge was made manifest by them in every place. He tells us that he lived by the faith of Christ, preached Christ, and so manifested Christ, as to be able to say,

For to me to live is Christ (Phil. 1:21);

and looked for Christ's coming again. If he wrote a letter, it was full of Christ; his inspired epistles show this. The apostle John also tells us that he was banished to the isle of Patmos for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. So we, being united to Christ, and indwelt by the Spirit of Christ, are exhorted to be rooted and built up in Christ, to rejoice in Christ, to have our conversation as becometh the gospel of Christ, and to wait for His coming. For these things, we need frequent spiritual renewings, constant supplies of grace, yea, to be filled with the Spirit; thus our head will lack no ointment.

I have said more to the believer than I intended; but the deep importance of these points would not allow me hastily to pass them by. In conclusion, let me earnestly say to the reader, Have you peace? If so, I am sure it is through the blood of Christ. There is no other way. Oh, unconverted friends! beware of any false ground. You cannot honor Christ unless you accept Him as your Savior, and

he that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent Him (John 5:23).

Beware of being religious without a present and everlasting salvation by Christ. On your receiving or rejecting Christ who was crucified for sinners your eternal destiny depends. He that believeth not shall be damned. But perhaps, my reader, you feel yourself a heavy-laden sinner; you acknowledge your

transgressions, and are ready to despair and give yourself up for lost. The utterances of your anxious heart are —

“Depth of mercy! can there be

Mercy still reserved for me?
Can my God His wrath forbear?
Me, the chief of sinners, spare?
I have long withstood His grace,
Long provoked Him to His face;
Would not hearken to His calls,
Grieved Him by a thousand falls.”

My friend, you need not despair. Christ died for the ungodly. He delighteth in mercy. His blood cleanseth from all sin. It rejoices His heart to save; and He still calls with outstretched arms to you, saying,

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Matt. 11:28).

Only believe.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved (Acts 16:31).

Happy those who can say —

“I hear the words of love,
I gaze upon the blood,
I see the mighty sacrifice,
And I have peace with God.

“’Tis everlasting peace!

Sure as Jehovah’s name;
’Tis stable as His steadfast throne,
For evermore the same.

“My love is oftentimes low,
My joy still ebbs and flows
But peace with Him remains the same,
No change Jehovah knows.

“I change, He changes not;
My Christ can never die;
His love, not mine, the resting-place,
His truth, not mine, the tie.

“The Cross still stands unchanged,
Though heaven is now His home;
The mighty stone is rolled away,
But yonder is His tomb!
“And yonder is my peace,
The grave of all my woes!
I know the Son of God has come,
I know He died and rose.”

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