

THE MAN OF GOD

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An examination of the character and evidence of a true believer as a man of God, discussing divine grace, adoption, and the visible marks of genuine Christian faith reflected in conduct.

21 Chapters

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Preface

THE MAN OF GOD

Or "Spiritual Religion Explained and Enforced"

"That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." 2 Timothy 3:17

PREFACE

It is a generally admitted truth, that in proportion to the length of any element, is its danger of losing in depth what it gains in space. This axiom in physics may equally apply to religion. In proportion to the prevalence of a profession of Christianity may be, in the same ratio, its shallowness and superficiality. While, therefore, we hail with gladness and hope every new impulse given to the cause of evangelization, and the corresponding interest awakened in the popular mind, we yet rejoice with trembling. We pause, and inquire- What will be the actual gain to vital religion from all this? When the attraction of novelty ceases, and the excitement of impassioned appeals evaporates, and the glow of what is simply and only natural and sympathetic, subsides, how much of the residuum that remains vital, spiritual, and permanent? This is a question of grave and solemn import. A false profession of religion, a spurious conversion, an invalid title to heaven, is of all fallacies and delusions the most momentous and fatal!

The following pages are an attempt to supply a corrective to this evil. They by no means propose to cover the entire ground. They rather seek to portray the man of God in some of the essential and prominent features of his holy character, and to trace a few of the stages of his Christian experience; making the Lord Jesus Christ- the Divine Man- the central object of the picture. Brevity in the unfolding of each subject has been studied, with the view of introducing, into so limited a work, as great and rich a variety of topic as possible. To the blessing of the Triune God, and to the prayers of the man of God, this small volume is devoutly commended. (April 1863)

The Man of God

The Man of God

Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth." 1 Kings 17:24

It is admitted by all conversant with Christian evidence that the internal proofs of the truth of Christianity surpass all others. This is undoubtedly so as to the evidence of experience. An individual may not be able thoroughly to understand either the external or the internal evidences of Christianity, but let him have the evidence of personal experience and he is convinced. No reasoning can overthrow, no sophistry can weaken, no assertions can remove it. A man that has the experience of the truth in his heart is armed with a mighty weapon with which to confront and confound his foes.

We do not say that there will not arise occasional mental difficulties and spiritual despondencies, casting a momentary cloud-veil upon the luster of his hope. But this we affirm, and affirm it fearlessly, that as it is impossible to admit the sun within a room and then sanely question its light, so is it impossible for Christ to take up His abode in the heart of a poor sinner unattended by clear and demonstrable evidence. Nor is this evidence confined to himself; others are compelled to acknowledge that he is a man of God, that he has "passed from death unto life that his Christianity is more than a symbol, that it is a fact; more than a resemblance, that it is a reality. Such is the truth we are about to demonstrate.

The narrative which suggests it will be familiar. The prophet Elijah enters the abode of mourning. The heir and hope of the house was a corpse- the young child lay dead. And the prophet, prompted by the instinct of humanity, as of gratitude for the hospitalities of that home, cried to God for the resuscitation of the child. And the Lord answered the prophet: "And the soul of the child came unto him again, and he revived." In view of prayer so prevalent, and of a divine answer so immediate, the gladsome mother exclaimed, "Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth."

This touching incident in the life of the prophet is highly suggestive. The truth we propose to illustrate by it is- the visibility of Christian evidence, as authenticating divine grace in the soul of man. A Christian should be known as such by every act of his life. He should be as a city set upon a hill; a lighthouse planted on a rock-bound coast, whose light is as luminous and unmistakable as its influence is welcome and salutary. His principles, his practice, his spirit, his whole carriage and life should be such as to inspire the exclamation, "By this I know that you are a man of God."

Let me first direct the reader's attention to the dignity of the Christian character- the Man of God. The world has its men of mark. There is the man of intellect, and he is known as such. The world looks upon him as a learned man, admires him as a man of culture. We may here venture the remark, that one of the popular sins of the age is the deifying of human intellect. It is an age of the worship of Reason. And one of the natural and fatal results is the bold, unblushing exaltation of

human philosophy over revealed truth.

There is, too, the man of rank. It is true it is an empty title that he wears, still he has a right to wear it, for God gave it to him. His Christianity- if he is a Christian- does not demand its surrender. He should use his coronet for God, and remain in the calling wherein grace has called him. There is the man of wealth. Money is, perhaps, his god, and there are not lacking those who worship the man as the impersonation of the deity. We do not assert that wealth is in itself a crime- it is the abuse of wealth that is the sin. To love it, hoarding it on the one hand penurously, or squandering it on the other prodigally, are both abuses wealth, and both are an abomination in the sight of God.

Then there is the man of taste and pleasure. Music, painting, sculpture, sensual delights, are the absorbing objects of his pursuit; and the world admires and cheers him on, for the world loves its own. Thus the world has its men of mark, its men of distinction whom it delights to honor.

But the Church has its men of distinction too. They are styled, "men of God." Who and what is a man of God? The world cannot match him- we challenge it, and say, "Bring out your man of intellect, measure him with the renewed mind, the intellect taught and disciplined by God the Spirit, trained in God's school, on whose faculties the light of heaven has shone- he is in comparison but a dwarf! Bring forth your man of rank, the coronet glittering upon his brow, the ermine gracefully enfolding his form- compare that rank with the rank of a believer in Christ, with one who can claim a filial relationship to God, calling Him "Father" -with one

who belongs to the blood-royal of Him who is "King of kings and Lord of lords," who belongs to the Royal Priesthood, and his earthly order, his human titles, pale into impressive insignificance. Bring out your men of pleasure- what are their highest, purest delights, contrasted with the joys, delights, and pleasures of the child of God? The pleasure of the one is but a "name, a mock, a sham; the joys and delights of the other are real, substantial, satisfying.

But these are general remarks only; it may be proper that we attempt to show, who the man of God is- what are the essential elements, the great attributes of his character. In the first place, a man of God is a partaker of God's nature. It is this that ennobles and exalts him, and gives him a character so distinctive, a dignity so lofty. He possesses another nature than his own. It is not of earthborn royalty, nor is it of angel-birth, it is nothing less, it could be nothing more, than the nature of God himself!

God's essential nature is, of course, incommunicable. But the believer is, through grace, and in virtue of His spiritual regeneration, made a partaker of the divine nature. He is born of God, begotten of God- a holy principle is implanted in his heart, and he is thereby united to God in a nature in which he towers above the highest angel in heaven, enshrined in deathless glory. Thus he becomes a man of God. The divine image is restored, the lost link is found, the filial relation is discovered, and man once more walks with God in all the renewed faculties of his soul in the sweetest, closest fellowship.

He is also a man of God by divine adoption. God has taken him into His family, and made him His child and His heir. "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!" That he does not always clearly discern his adoption, does not invalidate in the slightest degree the fact that he is so. Nor are the chastenings of God to be interpreted as signs militating against the divine relation. He may not always have the direct

witness of the Spirit, and he may often pass under the discipline of the rod; and yet, for all that, be a child of God still. No, the very chastening is a sign and seal of his adoption. "If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the Father does not chasten?"

Acceptance of Christ's salvation enters essentially into this character of a "man of God." It is astounding how far the unrenewed man will go in high admiration and approval of God, and yet be at variance with His Son. There is, there can be, no real love to, or spiritual relation with God, apart from a believing reception in the heart of His dear Son Christ Jesus. A man may respect and admire, adore and worship God, and yet hate, despise, and reject God's beloved Son. But what did Jesus say? "He that hates me hates my Father also." Thus, there can be no real love to God in our loftiest, most sublime conception of His loving character and works, when the heart is closed and barred in its deep, intense hatred of Jesus. A true man of God, then, is one who loves the Savior, believes in the Savior, has received the Savior in his heart, and has accepted His blood and righteousness as his one sole ground of justification here, and hope of glory hereafter. Oh, how precious is Jesus to a true "man of God!" How he prizes the 'unspeakable gift', and loves the Divine Giver!

In view of the statements thus far made, may we not indulge in a holy soliloquy something like this?- "If I am a partaker of the divine nature- if the Spirit of God has renewed my mind, God has made me- once an enemy and an alien, a child and an heir of glory. Oh, the dignity to which I am exalted, the glory to which I am chosen! God has 'set apart him who is godly for Himself,' and I am so set apart as His peculiar treasure! I am one upon whom God has set His heart- has taken out of the world to be His witness, to reflect His image, and to be a monument throughout eternity of His electing love, sovereign grace; and mighty power to save."

What an unfolding is here of the love of God! Who can tell how God loves "the man of God?" Does God love His own image? Then He loves it wherever He sees it. It may be, so to speak, but faintly engraved, imperfectly carved, obscurely and feebly exhibited; yet He loves it, be it the spiritual lisp of a child, the silent tear of a mourner, the gentle sighing of a contrite spirit, the tremulous touch of the believing hand, the filial uplifting of the eye- yes, wherever God sees His own holiness reflected, around that being His deepest affections cluster. Oh, how dear is that soul to God! "He who touches it, touches the apple of His eye."

What are some of the evidences which authenticate the character of "the man of God?" "By this I know that you are a man of God." Let it be remarked that it is a thing known. It is a fact which cannot be contradicted, a character which cannot be concealed. And God, too, will have it known, and will make it known. He will not have His mighty work concealed in the darkness and confusion of a moral chaos. When He created the world, He said, "Let there be light," that His work might be seen. So when He spiritually re-creates the soul, He bathes it in light, that His work and His power may be manifested. Now what are some of the evidences?

The first adduced is, the work of grace in his heart. By this we know he is a "man of God." This is God's own seal- His Divine attestation that he is "a man of God." He is taught- and this is his first step- by God the Spirit his own sinfulness; he is made to know the plague of his heart. There is the first evidence. A man once brought to see his sinfulness, in a moment prostrates in the dust all the lofty ideas of human merit, self-salvation, of legal obedience- the Babel of his own righteousness

topples and falls. Blessed state! Oh, do not substitute any other! Think not of the healing until you know the wounding. What do you know of sin, indwelling sin, your own sin? "Sin is the transgression of the law," and you are that transgressor! And until you know the sin of your heart, you know nothing of true Christianity. I speak not now merely of sin formally acknowledged, of sin slightly felt, of sin felt but loved, confessed but cherished; but of sin mourned over beneath the cross, sin hated, sin separated from, fastened to the cross, crucified and slain.

This work of grace in the heart also includes what we have already adverted to- a reception of Jesus. He has been brought to the great rest to which God brings all his sons- a rest in Jesus Christ. Oh, at what a vast expense has God provided this rest for a weary soul, this Savior for the lost! Where will you find such spiritual repose as this? Christ is a divine rest, perfect rest from the works, the curse, and the condemnation of the law, from the guilt, the accusations, and the tyranny of sin! Oh, what a Savior is Jesus! Not the Savior of the saint, but of the sinner; not the Savior of the righteous, but of the guilty; who saves us just as we are- lost, guilty, helpless; fully and freely. Here, then, is an unmistakable mark of a man of God. He has no other rest but Christ, acknowledges no other salvation but Christ's, stands in no other righteousness but Christ's. Christ is his all and in all.

The growth of this work in the heart authenticates his Christian character. To behold the seed bringing forth fruit, the kingdom of grace in the heart enlarging, the man of God growing in a divine knowledge of God, in a deeper knowledge of his own heart, pressing after higher degrees in personal holiness, higher rounds in his heavenly ascent- oh, this marks him to be a man of God! Do you see one thus battling with inbred sin- thus foiling the foe, breaking the spell, overcoming all opposition to his spiritual course? Then you see a man of God.

But there is another general evidence- the reflection of that grace in the life. If there was any truth on which our Lord laid especial stress in His teaching, it was the holy life of the believer. The imagery He constantly employed taught and illustrated this truth that His followers were everywhere to be known as such, His disciples to be recognized as such. How striking are His words! "You are the salt of the earth;" as if there were nothing savory in the world but what is found in the man of God. Again, "You are the light of the world. A city that is set upon a hill." Then comes the exhortation, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

With this harmonizes the apostolic teaching- "That you may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom shine you as lights in the world." Solemn words! Oh, the dignity of the Christian character! The believer is to shine- as a lighthouse- for that is the original idea- throwing its beams over the dark, stormy billows, guiding the watery pathway of some storm-tossed voyager. Every man of God is so to let his light so shine that others, bound to eternity, and, perhaps, exposed to many a peril, may find the true haven of eternal rest.

And what are some of these brilliant rays by which the divine grace of the soul is reflected? Take that most eminent one- a walk regulated by the fear of God. It is a distinctive mark of the ungodly that the fear of God is not before their eyes. But to see a man of God walking in this fear, saying, with Nehemiah, "So I did not do so, because of the fear of the Lord," is to trace one of the most essential and authentic evidences of his high and holy relationship. Nothing stamps him to be a

man of God like it. Walking softly, circumspectly, with a tender, blood-sprinkled conscience, shaping his course so as to please God in all things, setting the Lord always before him; here we have the Divine evidence of a man of God. "By this I know that you are a man of God."

Another ray of this light is the reflected image of Jesus- the meek, lowly, gentle Savior. His conversation is Christ-like, his spirit is Christ-like, all his actions savor of the religion, the spirit, and the example of Jesus. Look at him as a tried man. See him as one called to endure losses and crosses for Christ. Oh, how much is there in the sanctified spirit and deportment of a tried believer that reflects the character of a gracious man, that marks him indeed a man of God. When God chastens and corrects, instead of repining, rebelling, and fretting against the Lord, the man of God is mute under the rod, submissive and resigned to the will of his heavenly Father. He will plead, "I was dumb; I opened not my mouth, because You did it." Oh, there is nothing in his whole Christianity that more marks him a man of God than his spirit and carriage when passing under the hand of God. By this meek, gentle submission of spirit under God's most heavy chastisement, "I know that you are a man of God."

See another reflected ray in his separation from the world, standing out a solemn witness against its ungodliness and worldliness. His principles, his joys, his consolations, all the very opposites of the world that lies in wickedness. He dare not tread where they tread. He dare not do as they do. He has upon his brow the impress of God's image- not marked in baptism- away, away with that fiction!- but his Father's name written upon his forehead, his adoption and regeneration and calling visible, as the noontide light, in his whole demeanor. "By this I know than you are a man of God."

A few instructions and exhortations growing out of the subject will close this chapter. Let it not be supposed that the continuous and constant maintenance of this character is an easy thing; that it requires on our part no thought, vigilance, and anxiety. It is not an easy matter to keep the garment white and unsullied, the hands clean, the heart pure, passing through this ungodly, polluted, and polluting world.

In the first place, be exhorted to get a proper sense of the dignity of your character. Remember, by a most solemn and sacred profession, you are "a man of God." You have a relation and a dignity to maintain; interests confided to your keeping, an honor intrusted to your hands, to which angels cannot aspire. You will be essentially and mightily aided in this, by walking in a sense of your adoption. Get the clear witness of the Spirit that you have "passed from death unto life;" then the thought will never be absent from you- "I am a Christian, a man of God, a follower of Christ; an heir of glory; a royal priest. So let me order my conversation that I do not compromise my dignity as a Christian, or dishonor my Father as His child."

To this must be added prayerful vigilance. That is, watchfulness and prayer combined. The separation of these two precepts will neutralize them both. They must, to be influential and successful, be united. We must watch and pray; pray and watch. Satan knows our weakness, our most frail and exposed part, and there will he marshal his hosts. Keep within the chamber of prayer; and when you go forth to the scene of battle, keep your heart with all diligence, for there the first spiritual declension in the divine life begins.

Above all, live on Christ's upholding grace- on Christ's inexhaustible fulness: "Without me you can do nothing." In Christ, God has laid up for you all strength, all sufficiency, all grace. In your

weakness connect yourself to God's omnipotence; in your poverty, avail yourself of Christ's wealth. Draw largely from His grace, that you may be enabled, wherever you go, to extort, even from the scornful lip of infidelity itself, the exclamation, "By this I know that you are a man of God." Oh, receive the exhortation! Be a man of God wherever you are. As a man of rank, be the man of God- using that rank and the influence it gives to advance the glory of your Lord and Master. As a man of wealth, be the man of God- writing "holiness to the Lord" on all the worldly substance He has loaned you, and, with a large and benevolent heart, with an eye single to God's glory, counting it your highest honor to consecrate your property to Him.

As a professional man, be the man of God- adorning and hallowing your profession by your stern and unbending Christianity. As a man of business, be the man of God- conducting your worldly calling, not upon the infidel principles of the world, but, as a Christian man, upon the divine and unearthly principles of the gospel. As the head of a family, as a parent, as an employer, as a guardian, as a domestic, be the man of God; let your example before your children, your dependents, your servants, your employers, elicit the honored testimony, "By this I know that you are a man of God."

So let our light shine before men, that they may glorify our Father in us; so let us live, and so may we die, that our pathway may be trailed with light so luminous, undimmed, and deepening in its brightness and splendor, that when our sun sets it may go down in an unclouded effulgence- the glorious and holy sunset of "A MAN OF GOD."

Spiritual Life

Spiritual Life

"You are dead, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." - Colossians 3:3

It must be the desire of every child of God to stand complete in all the will of God. His aim is, not only that his justification may be complete in Christ, but that his sanctification may be ever tending towards perfectness. He desires not only that he might have an external righteousness to present him without spot to God, but also that the inward righteousness of the Holy Spirit might abound in him. If he places not before him the highest standard of holiness, his soul is in a sickly state. It was the end and aim of the apostle to build up a spiritual house; How high is the standard here placed before us! Christ enthroned at the right hand of God- there our affections are to center, and nothing lower than this. There are three points of consideration in this wondrous subject: the believer as DEAD; as POSSESSING LIFE; and as having that LIFE "HID WITH CHRIST IN GOD."

My dear reader, how can we close, our eyes to the solemn fact that spiritual death meets us at every turn? The world is one vast charnel house- a universal cemetery, well-near every dwelling represents a tomb, well-near every individual a corpse. This the Word of God most clearly affirms: "You has He quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins." This is not a figure of speech, nor a flower of rhetoric, but it is the declaration of a solemn fact- the description of a real state. The natural world is in a state of spiritual death. Our Lord alludes to this- A disciple came to him and said, "Lord, allow me first to go and bury my father." What does Jesus say? "Let the dead bury their dead." That is, let those who are unconverted, or spiritually dead, perform that which is in harmony with their own nature.

In John 6 our Lord refers to this truth, "Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, you have no life in you." Does the natural man eat the flesh of the Son of man? Does the world live on Christ? No, the natural mind hates that which is spiritual. It lives on the pleasures and pursuits of the world. It is a stranger to the blood and flesh of Christ, consequently there is no spiritual life in it. Oh, what an awful state is that of every unconverted man and woman who ponders this page! Those who live in pleasure are dead while they live. Sometimes your natural conscience seems alarmed, but the world comes in- your business, your family, your pleasures enter, and everything that did seem to have the semblance of life vanishes. You are dead to prayer, dead to faith, dead to love, dead to a life of holiness, and, your present death is but the prelude to that death that never, never dies.

But in a far different sense is the believer here spoken of as one DEAD. He is quickened that he may die. He dies that he may live. He is brought to life that he may know what death is. A man knows nothing of this spiritual death until he is brought to life. This is an unexplainable mystery to the carnal mind. See how the apostle states this truth: "For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me." The law, brought into his conscience by the power of the Holy Spirit, came with a slaying power.

To what did he die? To all the fond and wretched conceits of salvation by the law. In this sense the believer in Christ is dead. He dies to all his former hopes of acceptance with God by a righteousness of his own. It is a grand idea thrown out by the Holy Spirit, the believer's death with Christ. "I am crucified with Christ." Clear, then, is this truth, that the believer is mystically dead with Christ.

In what sense is the believer in Christ dead to sin? Is he dead to the indwelling of sin? Far from it, for the apostle speaks of "the sin that dwells in me." He is dead to the love of sin, to the reigning power of sin, to the condemnatory sentence of sin. Sin has no longer its former dominion over him. Though it dwells in him, he is so dead to it, that it no longer reigns over him with unsubdued and unbroken tyranny.

The believer is also dead to the world- "crucified unto the world." What a word is that! It ought to be ever before us! It is not necessary that the believer should go out of the world to be crucified to it. For a man to be in the world, filling up his station in life in which God's providence has placed, and God's grace finds him, yet to be crucified to it, to have his affections set on Christ, to be diligent in his lawful business, yet to have his treasure in heaven, and then to desire to have his affections soar and center, even in Him who is on the right hand of God- this it is to be crucified to the world.

But the believer is ALIVE. "Your life." It is spiritual life. It is a life from God: "You has He quickened." Who can quicken a poor, dead soul but God? O wretched doctrine, that makes man's will the turning-point of his divine life! God breathes it into the soul, and man becomes a spiritually living soul. The divine life is a new, spiritual, and deathless life. It is nothing less than the life of God. Guard this precious truth. If you do live, it is because God said, "Let there be life." This life, thus from God, is in and through Christ Jesus. He is set forth as having this life deposited in Him mediatorially for all His members. "For as the Father has life in Himself; so has He given to the Son to have life in Himself." Not for Himself, but for His people, (1 John iv. 9.)

No truth in God's Word shines out more clearly than this, that Christ is the life of the believer. We do not so much live by Christ, or through Christ, as that Christ lives in us "Christ in you the hope of glory." This life that comes from God, through Christ, is breathed into our souls by the blessed Spirit. "It is the Spirit that quickens." Mark this feature in the spiritual life of the believer. It is "YOUR life." It is their precious and priceless gift. It is theirs now. They have the germ in their hearts of that life that shall never die. Ask the carnal man, What is your life? "It is even a vapor which, appears for a little time, and then vanishes away." Oh, to think that your life is but a vapor soon gone!

But what is the believer's life? Poor, heartbroken sinner, hanging on Jesus your Life, moment by moment, your life springs from God himself; and because its source and its nature are divine, it shall survive the wreck of your frail humanity, and shall live on forever. It may be you are a poor, tried believer, hastening to the grave; but look at this spiritual life- it is as indestructible as God. You can say safely, "I have Christ dwelling in my heart, my portion and my all; and though my natural life is but a vapor which vanishes away, I have a life with Christ immortal as its Sire."

But we turn to the concealed character of this life. It is a HIDDEN life. The seat of this life is hidden. It is in the soul of man. It comes not with observation. It is invisible and intangible. It has its lodgment in the hidden, profound depths of the soul. Its existence and its workings are sealed from

human eye. Is it any marvel, then, that his life is a concealed one? What does the Lord say of the hidden glory of the Church? "The King's daughter is all glorious within." Hers is not an external and visible glory. That mere external glory is left for those who call themselves followers of Christ, but who, in the doctrine and precepts and spirit of His gospel, deny Him.

But the true glory of the Church consists in nothing external. It is a hidden, concealed glory; therefore the world does not, and cannot, see it. What can the world see of union with Christ, of regeneration, adoption, love, joy, and peace? It does not know God, and is not competent, therefore, to know and judge of His saints. The apostle beautifully states this- "The world knows us not, because it knew Him not."

And how much, too, is the life of God hid from the believer himself. Its existence, its evidences, and its workings are often obscure; but yet blessed are they who know what it is to sit in judgment upon themselves. But, veiled to us, it often is clear and manifest to others. They see it in the lowly spirit, in the tender conscience, and in the growing hatred of sin. Believers are trees of righteousness; and the analogy here is striking. I go into my garden, I mark the growth of the tree; but I see not the secret of its growth- it is hidden. How like this are hidden all the vital actings and supports of this heavenly life.

This should caution us how we sit in judgment upon the Christianity of our fellow-saints. We do not know how that little spark is kept alive: the inward conflict, the struggling, the mourning over sin, how hidden! But who keeps it alive? Who nourishes that hidden root? Christ, by His hidden manna, feeds it; and faith, traveling daily to the fountain, and living on His inexhaustible fulness, is the secret of its support.

Mark its twofold security. It is "hid with Christ." Our Christ is a hidden Christ. The world sees Him not, but the believer by faith sees Him. "Whom, having not seen, we love." Christ is not hidden from the child of God. Seeing Him, He is admired and adored, He is loved and followed. It is bound up in the very existence of Christ himself. He is the Head, we are the body; and are thus essentially and inseparably one. As the Head lives, so lives the body. Christ Himself says- "Because I live, you shall live also." Thus most truly is this life "hidden with Christ in God." "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish. My Father, who gave them me, is greater than all." I and my Father are one."

The subject thus briefly unfolded suggests some important reflections. In the first place, it brings us to the touchstone of truth. You are my reader, either dead or alive. Which is your state? What do you know of this hidden life? Test your real condition by this truth. For eternity decide it. It is of little moment what 'man' thinks of you. Are you alive, or are you dead? What are your pursuits? They shall testify. Can you say, "For me to live is Christ." Mistake not the evidence of this life. The tendency of this life is upward, heavenward. Is it thus with your affections, thoughts, and hopes?

This life, too, will find its level. What is its level? Nothing short of God himself. It comes from God, it rises to God. Can you say- "God, the Searcher of hearts, knows that the aim and tendency and desire of my soul is to Himself?" What a quiet yet solemn reproof is the nature of this life to the religious worldling! You are professedly dead. How then can you mix up with that to which you profess to be crucified by Christ? How can you be worldly, loving the world, and imitating the world, while partaking of a life that is essentially and forever heavenly?

Do not forget the great truth, that, though dead, yet you live. You are justified in expecting great and especial quickenings of this life in all seasons of trial. This was David's prayer: "I am afflicted very much; quicken me according to Your word." He did not make his affliction an excuse for his slothfulness or spiritual deadness. Affliction ought to be no lullaby to your soul. Our prayer in trial ought to be, "Now, Lord, quicken me. Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me."

Seasons of sanctified trial are seasons of revival. See, then, tried believer, see that your afflictions and troubles are seasons in which the life of God receives a new impulse in your soul. Let your desire be that your soul may be quickened afresh. Be it your desire- "I want to know more of the power of this life in my soul. I desire to walk closer with You, my Lord- nearer to You, my Savior."

I close with this remark- You can not give a stronger evidence that you are a partaker of this spiritual, hidden life, than that, in all God's dealings with you, the great importunate desire and prayer of your soul is, "Quicken me." This is the upward tendency of the life of God in your soul. Thus it mounts higher and higher, until it loses itself in God. And God becomes its perfect joy, and eternity its endless duration. "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

The Sinking Disciple, the Rescuing Savior

The Sinking Disciple, the Rescuing Savior

And beginning to sink, he cried, saying, "Lord, save me!" And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand and caught him." - Matthew 14:30-31.

There are few instances recorded in the Bible more strikingly illustrative, of the deep soul exercises of the believer, and the interposition of Christ's compassion and power in those exercises, than that which the present chapter seeks to improve. It was at the bidding of Christ, Peter threw himself upon the water to come to Him. It was by the power of Christ, he was upheld many steps in his miraculous walk. It was by the permission of Christ that sight was allowed to triumph over faith. And it was by the divine and gracious interposition of Christ, that, at the moment the victory seemed complete, the faltering, trembling, sinking disciple rose above the proud waters that went over him, and found refuge and salvation in the arms of his Divine Lord.

The whole incident is replete, with, the deepest spiritual instruction to the man of God. First, consider the circumstances in which this disciple is placed. He was "beginning to sink." Let us illustrate by this some of the spiritual depths and entanglements into which gracious souls are often placed, and which, because they are so little understood, beget, trembling and distrust, wrong notions of the character of God and of Christ, and thereby rob the believer of immense blessings, and God of much glory.

That these soul-exercises are common to the most eminent saints is clear from David's experience: "Out of the depths have I cried unto you, O Lord." "Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise your name." To what may we trace some of these depths, these sinkings, these imprisonments of soul, to which, more or less, the most gracious are exposed?

There is, for instance, the suspended sense of God's love in the heart. The experience of God's love by the believer is twofold. There are extraordinary manifestations of the love of God to his soul, as almost to compel him in rapture to exclaim, with the holy Payson, "Lord, withhold now Your hand, for I cannot endure more." Such manifestations are rare. We look upon them as a kind of cordial tasted only at broken intervals; else, were they constant, the believer would, in a measure, necessarily be unfitted for the daily duties of life.

The second experience of God's love we may term the ordinary manifestation- continued and abiding, from having the eye fixed upon Jesus, whose love enables him to bear up against the difficulties in his path with composure, to rise beyond the daily cares and anxieties of life, and to separate himself, as a man of God, from the snares of the world and the attractions of the creature, which otherwise would absorb too much of his affection and his thoughts.

What sinkings of soul, too, are felt, when the sensible presence of God is suspended for a time when, in consequence, a whole host of corruptions struggle for the mastery: old and strong infirmities, over which he had thought he had long since gained the victory; and, like David, is

ready to exclaim, "Remember not the sins of my youth!" These infirmities, weaknesses, and frailties, are permitted again to appear, accompanied, it may be, by a sense of God's wrath on the soul. And, added to this, a deep, overwhelming conviction of his uneven carriage before God.

When, upon self examination, in the calm, quiet hour of the closet, shut out from the world and from the flattery of friends, oh, how deep have been the convictions sometimes of the countless imperfections, the 'little fruit' that is seen after so much profession, the unkind requitals of all the Lord's goodness, the base returns which we have yielded back to God for mercies countless as the sands! What baseness, what vileness, what wretchedness! Oh, how the soul often sinks into these spiritual depths!

We will only add, the dark and distressing providences, the mysterious dispensations of God's government, almost bringing His own people to their wit's end; when their plan is thwarted, and their hope is disappointed, and our heavenly Father seems to be angry- oh, these are times when the man of God sinks, and cries, "Lord, I perish."

Here let us pause and propose the question to the unconverted reader- If judgment thus begins at the house of God, what must be your condition, whose lives are a constant sinking in the dark waves, having no rock to cling to, no bright hope to sustain you, whose whole life is downward, downward, until the final waves engulf you! Day after day, and month after month, you are satisfied to live without God, and without Christ, and without hope. Ponder, oh! ponder your condition; and before the last billow closes over your grave of eternal woe, send to heaven the cry, "Lord, save me, or I perish!"

We now turn to the prayer of the sinking disciple, "Lord, save me!" How illustrative is this of the Christian's experience. Where does the believer go when corruptions are strong, when sin is powerful, when providences are dark, and God hides His countenance from him for a season, but to Jesus? There is that in the renewed soul which cannot be destroyed, which not all the power of indwelling sin, nor the seductions of the world, nor the machinations of Satan, can stand against. As the magnetic needle, when disturbed, will yet tremulously retrace its steps; so the saint of God will turn to Jesus, notwithstanding the storms above and the billows beneath him- the false attractions of sense, or the deep discoveries of sin.

Let us for a moment analyze this petition of the disciple, and thus trace some of the characteristics of true prayer. Mark its earnestness. God often places His people in great emergencies, to rouse them from their lethargy, to test the sincerity, earnestness, and importunity of their supplications at a throne of grace. Why is it that there are so few answers to your prayers? Because you are so cold, so faulty in your desires for the "sure mercies of David." You think the faintest whisper will do. Your prayers are restrained before God; so God sends waves of tribulation upon you, and then prayer becomes urgent, and you seek, as it were, to take heaven by storm, and then you get the blessing.

Because there are no wrestlings in prayer, and so much indolence, the inordinate encroachments of the world and the creature absorbing your feelings and thoughts, God sends upon you, it may be, some heavy stroke- some fearful wave surges over you, for God loves you too well to allow you to walk at a distance from Him. He may permit you, for a time, to have your own way, until you fancy you can walk the waters of trial and sorrow in your own strength. But eventually He will

cause you to exclaim, "Lord, I sink; without You I can do nothing." Oh, whatever way God takes to stir you up to earnestness of prayer, receive it meekly, thankfully, joyfully.

There was also faith in Peter's prayer. Perhaps your circumstances may be such that no human being can fully sympathize with you. What do you do? You turn to Jesus as He who alone can meet your case. You exclaim- "Every step I take, I get deeper into trouble; my fears are heightened, my courage fails me." Well, be it so. In all your strugglings, faith still clings to Jesus. "Save me, Lord," is the cry of simple faith and what does this involve? The desire for salvation: The world has its attractions, joys, and delights, but one thing only the spiritually-awakened sinner thinks of, and that is, "How may I be saved?" Is it then for salvation you long and pray, my reader? Ah, every other blessing sinks into insignificance in comparison with this momentous question- "What must I do to be saved?"

Has this earnest cry been awakened in your heart? Do you feel yourself sinking beneath the dark waves of sin, and guilt, and woe? Then lose not a moment in uttering this cry of faith to Him who is ready to save. "You shall weep no more: He will be very gracious unto you at the voice of your cry; when He shall hear it, He will answer you."

Another striking feature of this prayer was its directness to Jesus. Do not say that Christ is to be ignored as an object of prayer; that prayer is only to be addressed to the Father. Here is a direct refutation of a notion so unscriptural, of an error so God-dishonoring. Peter prayed to Christ, addressed his appeal to the Savior; and so may, and so must you! You need to be saved from sin, from guilt, from hell, from the waves of adversity and sorrow, from the snares, the evils and the power of the world; from your corruptions and infirmities. To whom can you more appropriately address your petitions than to Jesus, the Savior. Look and cry to Christ as the sinking disciple did, for He is able to save to the uttermost all who appeal to His compassion, His grace, and His power.

Let us now mark THE SAVIOR'S RESPONSE: "And immediately Jesus stretched forth His hand, and caught him." It was immediate. The cry had scarcely been uttered when the hand of the Savior was outstretched. Oh, what a Savior is Jesus! How ready is He to respond, how prepared is He to sympathize, how mighty is He to deliver! The interposition was timed to the moment of danger and alarm. Thus the Lord reserves the resources of His grace, compassion, and help to our time of need. When the billows swell, when the trouble comes, when the need presses, when the sorrow overwhelms; then, when the timid, fearful disciple begins to sink, the Lord interposes, blending His tender chiding with His gracious deliverance: "Jesus caught him, and said unto him, O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Such, my reader, is the savior now! He is just as near to you, just as loving, just as powerful, just as ready as when He snatched Peter from the waves, quelled his fears, and brought him through the billows in safety to the shore. Did God ever permit a child of His love to sink? Oh no! The waters of tribulation may roar and be troubled, the mountains of human support may shake with the swelling thereof; nevertheless, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble therefore will we not fear."

Tribulation, conflict, and trial, go to make up much of the life of the Christian. But then it is he must look to the promises for his comfort, and take the precepts as his guide. Sinking times should be

praying, trusting times; and when the heart is overwhelmed and bowed down with sorrow, yet pray on, and trust on, and so praying and so trusting, not a wave of sorrow can engulf you. But you will be led through the surges unto the Rock that is higher than you. See how near Jesus is. He is a very present help- near, when you cannot trace Him and at your side when you cannot perceive Him.

And finally, at the hour of death, when the billows of Jordan swell around you, when heart and flesh fail, trust the faithful Promiser- a present Christ will bear you through, and bring you out into a wealthy place. "In Your presence is fulness of joy; at Your right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

"Why those fears? behold, it is Jesus

Holds the helm and guides the ship;

Spread the sails, and catch the breezes

Sent to waft us through the deep,

To the regions

Where the mourners cease to weep."

"Though the shore we hope to land on

Only by report is known,

Yet we freely all abandon,

Led by that report alone;

And with Jesus

Through the trackless deep move on."

"Led by that, we brave the ocean;

Led by that, the storms defy;

Calm amid tumultuous motion,

Knowing that the Lord is nigh,

Waves obey Him,

And the storms before Him fly."

"Rendered safe by His protection,

We shall pass the watery waste;

Trusting to His wise protection,

We shall gain the port at last;

And with wonder,

Think on toils and dangers past."

"Oh! what pleasures there await us!

There the tempests cease to roar:

There it is that those who hate us

Can molest our peace no more

Trouble ceases,

On that tranquil, happy shore." -Kelly

Christ's Gracious Words

Christ's Gracious Words

"All who were there spoke well of him and were amazed by the gracious words that fell from his lips." Luke 4:22

"And all bore him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth." - Luke 4:22

It was one of the grand and peculiar characteristics of our Lord's preaching, that He Himself was the great theme. Without entrenching upon His Father's glory, or arrogating to Himself an honor not His own, He could embody in His teachings all the truth of which He himself was the subject. As He came down from heaven to reveal heaven, as He came from the bosom of His Father to unveil that bosom, as He was one with the Father, it was impossible that He could faithfully and fully proclaim His gospel unless He Himself were its one grand and holy theme. The passage at the head of this chapter presents to us a view of the subject, character, and glory of the Lord's preaching. Indeed, it was most glorious for it was a proclamation of grace to fallen, sinful man. It is a testimony wrung from the lips of His unwilling witnesses, from individuals who had no sympathy with the grand theme of His mission, who rejected His person and His preaching, because of the humiliating character of both; yet they stood amazed at the words with which that ministry was unfolded.

The first truth that the passage suggests to us is that the Lord Jesus is one into whose lips God's grace is poured; and the second is the gracious words that proceeded out of those lips. In Psalm 45 we have this truth beautifully exhibited: "My heart is inditing a good matter [the matter is always good where Christ is the substance,] my tongue is the pen of a ready writer. You are fairer than the children of men; grace is poured into your lips." You who have a spiritual eye to discern spiritual things will find another striking unfolding of this truth in Cant. 5:13,16: "His cheeks are as a bed of spices his lips like lilies, dropping sweet smelling myrrh; His mouth is most sweet." It is a description by the Church of the superlative excellence and preciousness of her Lord. This is one of the marked excellences His anointed lips. The great truth here set forth is the plenitude of grace poured into the humanity of our adorable Lord not into His lips merely.

Alas! how many of us have cause to mourn over the shallowness of our grace, it going no deeper than the lip yet of how many professors it may be said, "they have no grace even in their lips; their lips utter no words of grace." We speak not of volubility, for little confidence do we place in much talking and in long prayers. It is an easy matter for a man to talk fluently of divine things, and yet live a most unholy life. We know that the deepest water is the most quiet, and the brook that is the most shallow is the most noisy. The grace that is welled the deepest in a man's heart will be exhibited in the most humble walk with God. He will talk like a man deeply feeling the power of the truths of which he speaks. As Hart quaintly expresses it, "not loud talkers, but, lowly walkers." Blessed is the man in whose lips grace is poured, who can talk of Christ, the King in His beauty-

who can testify he has felt God's love in his heart- that there is grace in Christ to break the strongest corruption, consolation in Christ to lift the soul above its sorrow- that there is that in Jesus that can make a man happy in the midst of the wreck of all created good!

The grace that was poured into the lips of Christ welled up from the depths of His manhood. There was a blessed necessity that our Lord should be endowed with all grace. He stood as the Head of His Church. Adam was originally its head and all the grace of the Church was deposited in him. - But the grace was deposited in a mere creature; that creature, left to itself, fell; and when it fell, the beautiful vessel in which the sacred treasure was deposited was destroyed, and the Church became a bankrupt and necessitous Church. In order to her recovery, it was necessary there should be another vessel of grace into which the grace of the Church should be deposited. Where would God look for that vessel? He would not look for it in angels, for they were but creatures, and God had tested the creature; and why may not angels fall, as they had already fallen? Where would He then look for the vessel? He saw one dwelling in His bosom. His own beloved Son, one co-equal with Himself, essential with Himself; and in that Son He deposited the grace of the Church. He made Him the Vessel in which He placed it, and from which every vessel of mercy shall be fully and eternally replenished. Now, that part of our Savior's complex nature into which this grace was deposited was His humanity. It could not possibly be His deity. The Spirit without measure was poured upon Christ; and as man, He was made the depository of this rich grace, yet all derived from His Godhead- the fountain, where it flowed.

We proceed now to consider the gracious words that proceeded out of those lips. It will be difficult to imagine any other than gracious words flowing from Christ, whose heart was the overflowing fountain of grace and love. Our Lord was the great Prophet of His Church. A greater than He never appeared, to whom His hearers bore witness, "Never a man spoke like this man." What, for example, are His doctrines but doctrines of grace? Our Lord was a doctrinal preacher. He made doctrine the basis of precept, and precept the basis of promise. It is the foundation of all truth. Did He propound the everlasting love of the Father? Did He set forth the great doctrine, the election of grace? Did He exhibit the sovereignty of God's mercy? Did He unfold the perpetuity of God's covenant? They were all exhibited as doctrines that laid man's pride in the dust, and exalted the grace and mercy of God. There is not a doctrine in Christ's ministry that does not tend to abase the creature.

We know that these doctrines are by some abused, awfully abused- nevertheless, the abuse of a doctrine is no valid argument against the truth or holiness of a doctrine. But we know there are those who do use them to the glory of God's name, and can bear this testimony, "I never saw my heart so sinful, I never was so weaned from self-confidence, as when these glorious doctrines of grace were opened up to my mind by the power of the blessed Spirit, and I saw that God's everlasting love, God's choice of me, the effectual calling of the Spirit, sprang from the fathomless depths of His most full and sovereign grace."

And was not this free, unconditional grace the charm of Christ's preaching? Did He not reiterate the glorious truth, "You have destroyed yourself, but in Me is your help." Was not His one blessed theme, the announcement of God's matchless love and pardoning grace to the vilest sinner, drawn by the Spirit to avail himself of the divine and precious boon?

The promises that fell from His lips, were they not gracious Words? Were they not such as met the circumstances of man's deep necessity as a sinner, based upon the free mercy of God in Christ? Oh, if the promise of a Savior's blood had waited until it saw in its recipient some virtue, some merit, then that promise of sin-forgiving grace would have never saluted our ear. But they are promises of free, rich grace; and it is a humiliating reflection, had God dealt with us after our dealings with Him, He would have withdrawn every promise of grace which now cheers and sustains our pilgrimage.

What, too, are the invitations of Christ but gracious words? Truly, "His lips are like lilies." When He invites the weary and the burdened to come to Him for rest; when He stretches out His gracious hand to the vilest sinner, to the man who has lifted his arm against God; when He heals the broken heart, lifts up the dejected spirit, and with the skillful tongue of the learned, speaks a word in season to him that is weary; are they not gracious words? The invitation that bids me to throw down the weapons of my rebellion before the cross, and meet the embrace of a reconciled Father- is not that gracious? The invitation that bids me come and slake my soul's deep thirst at the well-spring of free salvation- is not that gracious? The invitation that bids me reason the matter with God, and tells me that "though my sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool"- is not that gracious? The invitation that bids me lay my deepest sorrows on His heart, and my heaviest burdens on His arm; is not that gracious? O beloved! the words of Jesus are full of grace and there is nothing in the gospel of Christ that wakes one harsh note upon the ear of a poor, sin-burdened, guilt-distressed soul.

There may be an allusion here to the manner of our Lord's teaching- He spoke gracefully. There was that in His mode of stating the gospel like Himself. There was nothing harsh or severe in His unfoldings of truth. He spoke like one who had authority. "I am the light of the world," "I am the way, the truth, and the life," "I am the bread of life," "I am the good Shepherd," "I have come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly," "You call me Master and Lord; you say well, for so I am." With what authority He preached, with what boldness He enunciated His own gospel! And it is no small comfort to a child of God to know that He has authority to announce salvation, to declare the mind of God, and that, if we believe His testimony, and cast ourselves upon His word, we shall be saved. There is no view of the Lord's ministry more blessed than this. With what dignity and skill did He speak! His enemies sought to entangle Him in His conversations. Did they ever succeed? No, did He not foil them with their own weapons, and send them away abashed at their folly?

Let us for a few moments trace the different effects which the words of Christ have upon some. In all cases it is not the same. This unfolds an instructive feature- that the same gospel some times produces almost opposite effects. In some, the emotion of wonder is produced. It was so with regard to the hearers in the present instance. There they rested. What was it prevented a deeper impression upon their minds? We have it in the question they asked- "Is not this Joseph's son?" They knew Him from early life, knew His parents and His avocation, and they stumbled at the external lowliness of the great Prophet of the Church. May we not detect the workings of similar feelings in the minds of men in the present day?

Why do men ignore Christianity? Why do they reject the Savior? They are confounded at the philosophy, and are amazed at the depth of thought there is in Christianity! They are lost in

admiration at its morality, and are enchanted with its purity and sublimity; and yet they reject the salvation and refuse the Savior, and rest in the mere emotion of wonder; and thus the truth of Christ produces no permanent and saving impression. Their condition is graphically described in Ezekiel, "They come unto you as the people come, and they sit before you as my people, and they hear your words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goes after their covetousness. And, lo, you are unto them as a very lovely song of one that has a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear your words, but they do them not." Eloquence attracts them, intellect delights them, gracefulness charms them, and they go away but to hug more closely the chain that binds them to the service of sin and Satan, to live ungodly, and to die hopelessly.

My reader, is it possible to evade the solemn conviction that there will be summoned up at the last day a record of all these means of grace- the sermons you have heard, these pages that you read- as witnesses against you before God's tribunal? See how far you may go, and yet stop short of doing the will of God. Do not be deceived! Is your judgment informed? -it is not religion. Is your taste pleased? -it is not religion. Is your imagination feasted? -it is not religion. True religion is to break the thralldom of sin and Satan. Religion constrains us to walk humbly with God, to live for an eternal world, to receive Christ as the Savior and Redeemer, laying our own righteousness beneath the cross as vile and worthless, and stretching out the hand of faith for the righteousness of God's dear Son.

With others, it is the emotion of gratitude, love, and praise. They heard the gracious words of the gospel, and they were just the words they needed. They came as poor bankrupts, with the pressure of guilt upon their hearts, with the great inquiry, "How may I be just with God?" The Savior met them, bade them bathe in the fountain of His precious blood, cast from them their own righteousness, and rest in His finished work, yes, to rest in Himself; and they were saved!

So, my reader, may you be found hanging upon the lips of the Savior, into which grace was poured, and from which words of grace abundantly flow. And may the Spirit of all grace enable you not to stop at admiration, but pass on to acceptance, imitation, and obedience, that Christ Jesus may be formed in your heart the hope of glory! Oh, do these pages speak to one heart-broken sinner? It is their mission to tell you that the Lord Jesus has not in His lips one harsh expression for your ear. He invites you to receive salvation. He bids you come and sit down at His feet, and hear the gracious words that flow from His anointed lips. Precious Son of God! at Your feet we will sit, on Your lips we will hang- You alone shall be our Teacher, our Prophet, Priest, and King.

"Encouraged by Your word

Of promise to the poor,

Behold a beggar, Lord,

Waits at Your mercy's door

No hand, no heart, O Lord, but Thine,

Can help or pity wants like mine."

"The beggar's usual plea,

Relief from men to gain,
If offered unto Thee,
I know You would disdain;
And pleas which move Your gracious ear
Are such as men would scorn to hear."

"I have no right to say,
That though I now am poor,
Yet once there was a day
When I possessed more
You know that from my very birth
I've been the poorest wretch on earth."

"Nor can I dare profess,
As beggars often do,
Though great is my distress,
My faults have been but few
If You should leave my soul to starve,
It would be well what I deserve."

"It was folly to pretend
I never begged before,
Or if You now befriend,
I'll trouble You no more
You often have relieved my pain,
And often I must come again."

"Though crumbs are much too good
For such a dog as I,
No less than children's food
My soul can satisfy.

Oh, do not frown and bid me go!
I must have all You can bestow."

"Nor can I willing be
Your bounty to conceal
From others, who, like me,
Their needs and hunger feel.
I'll tell them of Your mercy's store,
And try to send a thousand more."
"Your thoughts, You only Wise!
Our thoughts and ways transcend,
Far as the arched skies
Above the earth extend
Such pleas as mine men would not bear
But God receives a beggar's prayer."

Learning of Jesus

Learning of Jesus

"Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and you shall find rest for your souls." Matthew 9:29

Our blessed Lord, the Prophet come from God, differed in this particular from all other teachers- He designed that His disciples and followers should not only believe in His person, embrace and follow His doctrine, but that they should be assimilated to His image. He came not merely to inform the judgment with truth, but, penetrating into the innermost recesses of the soul, He sought to transform His disciples into His own moral nature, so that He presented Himself to His people as the Model they were to imitate, as the Teacher from whom they were to learn.

Such are the truths embodied in these beautiful words of our blessed Lord, in considering which, as we trust the Holy Spirit will teach us, we shall direct the reader's attention, to the PORTRAIT of Christ; the EXHORTATION of Christ; the PROMISE of Christ.

Our Lord Jesus alone could draw His own moral portrait. His own person was so mysterious, His name so wonderful, His character so lofty; there was such a blending of the two extremes of being in their highest perfection, the absolute God and the perfect man, that it would have been utterly impossible for any finite mind to portray Him in original perfection. Christ alone could reveal Himself. As no one knows the Father, but Christ the Son, so no one knows the Son, or has an understanding of the character of Christ, or can trace the fine delicate shades of the portrait, but those to whom Christ himself reveals it. Now here is our blessed Lord portraying His own character, drawing His own image. It was no vain pride, no self-conceit in Jesus, when he thus portrayed Himself.

We deem it one of the profoundest acts of humility in the saints of God gratefully to acknowledge the grace which God gives them. It is false humility to conceal any measure of grace which Jesus has vouchsafed; and to deny any part of the work of the Lord Jesus in our soul. Oh, beware, in the deepest confessions of your unworthiness, of abjuring the grace of God in you. If the Lord has given you the smallest degree of knowledge, the least measure of faith, and the weakest portion of love, acknowledge it, to the praise and glory of His sovereign grace who has made you what you are.

Let us, then, contemplate this portrait of the Lord Jesus, "I am meek and lowly in heart." We trace it in the first great condescension when He assumed our nature. What an unfolding was this of the lowliness and meekness of Jesus! For we must ever bear in mind that it was not a finite being descending to a lower scale in the finite. Were an angel to become human, it would be but a finite being coming down in the scale of the finite. And where would be the profound stoop, the marvellous condescension and humility? But here was the Infinite stooping to the finite! Here was the Divine assuming the human, between which there existed no comparison! You may weigh one finite thing with another. There is some comparison between a grain of sand and an Egyptian

pyramid. But there is no comparison between the finite and the Infinite, so vast and immeasurable is the difference.

Now mark the great condescension of Jesus. Though He was Infinite, He stooped to the finite. Though He was "God over all blessed forevermore," He became "bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh." Contemplate in some of its features this exhibition of the lowliness and meekness of Him who though He was in the form of God, and thought it no robbery to be equal with God, yet assumed our nature and became man. Study His filial reverence to His earthly parents- it forms one of the loveliest traits of His human character. He placed Himself under parental law, recognized parental authority, and was subject to His parents in all things. What an example for the young! Christ honored His parents- imitate Him in this, and He will honor you.

Look at His baptism. It was an astonishing exhibition of His condescension and lowliness. One marvels not, when He appeared on the banks of the Jordan, and asked the rite of baptism at the hands of the evangelist, that John should have said, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me? Allow it to be so now," said the lowly, condescending Jesus; "for thus it is necessary to fulfil all righteousness." Then, descending into the stream, He was baptized, illustrating His precept by His own act, thus leaving us an example that we should follow in His steps.

Then travel to His cross; see Him emerge from the gate of Jerusalem bearing the wood upon His shoulders- see Him travel with it to the hill of Calvary; there behold Him like a sheep, dumb before His shearers, so He opened not His mouth. See Him resigning Himself into the hands of His murderers, offering no resistance, breathing no reply, threatening no vengeance, but, like a lamb led to the slaughter, meekly bowing His blessed head to the stroke, with no words breathing from His lips but forgiveness to His enemies.

Trace the Savior's whole carriage while on earth- meekness and lowliness marked every act. Look at His deportment with His disciples- washing their feet, administering to their necessities, looking after their comfort, bearing with their infirmities, and in a thousand nameless ways blending the dignity of the God with the condescension, tenderness, and lowliness of the man. Well might He say, "Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly of heart." "Behold the Lamb of God,"- the God-man enduring all this without a murmur, "who, when He was reviled, reviled not again."

Trace the same character of Christ in all His dealings with a poor, tried, sin-burdened, heartbroken sinner. Is there anything in the spirit of Christ, or in the conduct of Christ, with a soul who feels his poverty and emptiness, contrary to this character of condescension, meekness, and lowliness? No! my reader, no! If there is one who, if we may use the expression, draws out this character more than another, it is that poor soul who, bowed beneath its burden of sin, sues for pardon and mercy at His feet.

I see the smoking flax- the bruised reed; not a spark visible in the one, no strength apparently in the other. It is the image of that weak faith, that little grace, that bruised and bowed spirit with which the Savior delights to come in contact. "A bruised reed He shall not break, and smoking flax He shall not quench." Oh, no! His love, grace, and power will mend the one and fan the other.

What shall I say of His dealing with a poor afflicted believer? Ah, we little know what the sympathy of Jesus is for His sorrowing ones; what His compassion is for His afflicted ones; what His

condescension is for those who, are treading the steps He trod- the path of suffering, of trial and adversity; that leads to the kingdom. Can He look coldly at our case? Can He deal harshly and unsympathisingly with our sorrow? Can He sport with our grief and trifle with our woe? Utterly impossible! Are you afflicted? Are you in sorrow? Are you tempted? Are you in poverty? Think of the kindness, the gentleness, and sympathy of Jesus; hear Him say, "Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and you shall find rest unto your souls. My heart is the home of meekness and lowliness, kindness, sympathy, and love. I am prepared to embosom myself in your grief, and make it all My own."

Now, observe, appended to this character and portrait is AN EXHORTATION, "learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart." "Learn of me." We are to come to Jesus as learners. There are two characters in which our Lord is represented to us in this exhortation. First, He appears as a Teacher. "Learn of me- sit at my feet- become my disciple." The only authoritative Teacher in the Church of God, the only true Prophet, is the Lord Jesus Christ. Why is it there is so much error in the Church of God? Why is there is so much darkness and crudeness in the books we read, and in the sermons we hear? Why is it that we see so much ignorance and obscurity in setting forth the truth of God? It is because men will not sit at the feet of Jesus and learn of Him. Men would rather learn of their fellow men than of the God-man; they prefer human writings to the Divine- the school of man, to the school of God. And this is one reason why there is so much false doctrine, the teaching that causes to err, both from the pulpit and from the press. We may be carried away by great learning, brilliant genius, and apparently profound piety; but if we place ourselves at the feet of Jesus as a lowly disciple, and there receive our views of truth, we shall then understand those profound mysteries of God's revealed Word, which are hidden from the worldly wise and prudent, but revealed to those who become learners of Christ.

Secondly, Our Lord also would have, us learn of Him as our Pattern and Model. "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart," that is, "Imitate me, resemble me, learn to be like me." Jesus was a living epistle of His own gospel- the impersonal embodiment of His own truth. There is not a doctrine He expounded, or a precept He enjoined, that He did not exemplify in His own life. Learn of Him in His submission to the Divine will. Oh, what perfect blending of the will of Christ with the will of God! Not more perfectly blended are the hues of the rainbow than was the will of Jesus with the will of God. Come, learn submission to the Divine will.

Do you find it hard to bow to that will at this moment? Perhaps the bitter cup trembles in your hand. Perhaps a dark cloud overshadows you. Perhaps the path in which by the providence of God you are called to walk, is rough. Perhaps the surrender you are called to make is painful. Perhaps you feel your will in painful antagonism to God's will. There is a controversy between God and you; you cannot drink that bitter cup, you cannot enter into that dark cloud, you cannot tread that thorny path, you cannot take up that heavy cross, you cannot make that sad surrender. The cup is too bitter, the cloud too dark, and the road too rough. Come, sit at His feet, and learn a lesson of submission to the Divine authority, and to the Father's will. Hear your Lord and Master say, "The cup which my Father has given me, shall I not drink it?" "O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me unless I drink it, may Your will be done."

Look, too, at His patient endurance of suffering! Are you a sufferer, suffering from God, or suffering from the world? Or, it may be, suffering from your fellow-saints; for of all the sufferings the saints of

God endure from man, the deepest wounds, the heaviest trials, alas! are often from our fellow-believers. Even like our blessed Master, no hand smote Him so heavily, He felt no sorrow so severely, as that which came from the disciples whom he loved.

But, beloved, learn of Jesus. Learn patient endurance under suffering. Learn to receive it with meekness, silence, and lowliness. Learn to breathe a blessing for a curse, and to give a look of love for a frown of anger. Learn from Him- when reviled, to revile not again. Imitate Him in His meekness and lowliness, in His carriage and deportment, as He traveled through this world, in all the acts of kindness He performed, the words He spoke, and the whole spirit He exemplified. See how holy, and condescending, and humble He was. Imbibe His temper and spirit, remembering that pride, malice, and revenge, are improper in the disciple of the meek and lowly Jesus. Learn of Christ, who was meek and lowly in heart.

Beloved, the great thing is to have the heart right in the sight of God. God looks at the heart. Men may mistake sometimes, and suppose such a one is harsh, and unsympathizing, and proud, and all the while God may see within a heart that will at any moment stoop to the lowliest and most menial service for Christ's sake. It is the heart that God looks at. Others may misinterpret the state of your heart, and may misconstrue your words and actions; but if the Lord sees that yours is a humble and condescending heart; a heart which, if need be, would prompt you to go to the obscurest saint of God and discharge lowly offices of kindness and love for Christ's sake; such a heart and such conduct is acceptable in the sight of God. Many a man may appear to be humble and meek, but in heart there may be pride and covetousness- a spirit of which God has said, "I cannot bear with." Lord, search my heart!

I desire for you, my reader, and for you, O my soul, to walk worthy of the vocation with which you are called; to act, to live, to speak, as under the all-observing eye of the heart-searching God. Then you can endure meekly man's erroneous interpretation; and with dignity, blended with the profoundest humility of soul, can act independently of your fellow's opinion, presenting your heart to God's inspection, and saying, "Lord, my heart is not proud, nor my eyes lofty, neither do I exercise myself in matters too high for me." "Search me, O God, and know my heart; prove me and know my ways, and see if there be any evil way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." "Oh, learn of me," says the Savior, "for I am meek and lowly in heart."

Then comes the gracious promise- the blessed repose found only in sitting at Jesus' feet as learners and imitators: "And you shall find rest for your souls." What an expressive word is this! Beloved, have you found this rest? How few are there who know it by experience! This is a restless world. Where is real rest to be found? Only by sitting at the feet of Jesus, and learning of Him. Look at the mental rest a man finds, who gives up his own reason, and, as a pupil, repairs to the feet of Jesus for instruction. The moment a man goes to the feet of Christ, and submits his judgment to the judgment of Christ, he finds mental rest. The moment he receives the truths of the gospel from Christ, he finds repose.

He has, perhaps, been tossed on the sea of speculation and false doctrine; driven from teacher to teacher, from book to book, from church to church, from school to school, knowing not what mental rest is. He finds human opinions conflicting, and knows not where to search for the truth. But giving up his research, and sitting as a little child at the feet of Jesus, with the prayer breathing from his heart, "Lord, what I know not, teach me; I am ignorant, instruct me; I am in darkness,

illumine me; I am but as a child in knowledge, give me understanding. I give myself up to Your teaching; I cast myself upon Your instruction; be my Teacher and my Prophet;" soon he will receive that divine illumination, and that mental rest which is experienced only in a child-like reception of the truths of the gospel from the lips and at the feet of Jesus.

There is rest, too, for the soul in the atoning work of Jesus: rest from sense of guilt, from fear of condemnation, and from the terrors of the law. Perfect rest does that soul find that comes to Jesus' feet, and receives in childlike faith the atonement He has made for the chief of sinners.

Rest of heart, too, does he find who takes his place at the feet of Jesus in the spirit of obedience to Christ. "Take my yoke upon you," says the Savior, "and learn of me." Take my commands, take my precepts, take my cross, take my example, and bow your neck to my yoke- the yoke of my truth, the yoke of my precept, the yoke of my commands, the yoke of my example, the yoke of my love. And in wearing it, you shall find rest unto your soul.

This rest is found only in obedience to Christ's command. Many a saint of God sees some especial and positive command of Jesus; but, because the yoke is irksome and requires some little sacrifice, he shrinks from it and finds no rest. Ah, my reader, if you see a positive command or precept of Jesus to be obligatory upon you as a professed disciple, your heart will be restless and agitated until you bow with obedience, meekness and lowliness, to the command, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me." "If you love Me keep my commandments."

Oh, what a privileged place is this to which Jesus invites you! It is at His blessed feet! Favored spot! The feet that trod many a weary mile for you! The feet that were transfixed to the cross for you! Take all your sorrows, all your trials, all your sins there- your schemes frustrated, your cisterns broken, your heart's loneliness, your dark providences, the deep problems in your Father's dealings- study and solve them in Christ's school, at Christ's feet. Be willing to learn, whatever the school in which Your Lord and Savior may see best to place you in. Oh, study to be Christ-like in your spirit, deportment, and actions.

Ask yourself in all that you do, "Is this Christlike?" Did He ever expose the infirmity of a brother, or of a sister? Did He ever trample in the dust any individual, be he foe or friend? "Lord, at Your feet a learner would I be, a disciple, a little child. Teach me; fashion me into Your own lovely image, for I would transcribe the lineaments of Your perfect character to myself, that when others see me, they may take knowledge of me that I have been with Jesus, and have learned of Him."

The Mute Sufferer

The Mute Sufferer

"He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth." Isaiah 53:7

There is a state of soul-quietness which is the peculiar privilege of the saints of the Most High, and which, in fact, can only be experienced by those who are in a state of friendship with God. Yet notwithstanding this, in a world of turmoil, and even in the excitement of what is termed the religious world, there is great danger of impairing, if not losing, this precious and holy state. We therefore desire, in this chapter of our work, to strengthen your faith; by placing before you the Lord Jesus Christ, as illustrating and exemplifying in His own conduct; amid circumstances the most trying and painful, that state of quietness of soul, of mute submission to the will of God, which it is the high privilege of the believer to possess and imitate.

We shall never so value, or so deeply feel the force of any single precept as when we see it embodied in the example of Jesus Christ, as the personal illustration of all the precepts which are to be exemplified in the Christian's life. Just as no motive or action can be properly seen or studied but in the light of the cross, so no principle of conduct can be evangelical and potent but as drawn from the teaching and life of Emmanuel. "He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth." This wonderful passage leads us to study Christ's burden- soul-depression, and the mute deportment He exhibited.

Such an extraordinary state of soul-distress must have its adequate cause. Upon what principle are we to account for the oppression of the Son of God? What shall give us anything like a reasonable clue to it? "He was oppressed." The word "oppressed" is sometimes employed in the sense of exaction. It is used when tribute is claimed; when a debt is enforced, the payment of which is exacted. Now what was exacted of Christ? What claim is enforced? When Divine Justice traveled to the cross of Calvary, she found the Son of God, suspended there in the character of a Substitute. He suffered as standing in the place of His Church, as the substitute of His people. When an individual affixes his name to a bond in commercial transactions, he becomes responsible for the payment of that bond. It is as though he had exchanged places with the original signer of the document. He becomes legally bound to honor that bond whenever exaction shall be made.

Precisely in the same light the Son of God stood as the Surety of His Church. By a divine act of love, He placed Himself in her condition, and undertook to discharge all that great debt which she owed to the moral government of God. In a word, Christ became the Substitute of His people, took the place of the fallen sinner, and undertook to discharge the stupendous claim, for the payment of which he had signed the bond in the eternal counsel of the Triune Jehovah. And now, what is the nature of the burden which Jesus bare? He was standing beneath the sins of His people: He was bearing the transgressions and iniquities of His elect. He was paying the bond to which He had affixed His name. In a word, He was cancelling the great debt.

He was discharging the tremendous obligation which His people lay under to the justice and holiness of God. The payment of that debt was exacted of Him because He became the Sinbearer of His people. Hence, we have the meaning of those prophetic words of Christ "Then I restored that which I took not away." What was it that Christ restored which He did not take away? Oh, it was the glory of God's government, the honor of God's law, the perfection of the Divine precept, the great debt to the moral government of Jehovah! Christ, by His obedience to the law, and by His paying the penalty to justice, restored to the divine government of God, the glory and honor which He took not away. And oh, what a glorious and perfect restoration was that which the sinless Son of God gave, standing as the Surety and Head of His Church! Now, this is the doctrine of the text.

But what is the comfort and consolation which this doctrine is so calculated to bring to our souls? It is the richest in its nature that the gospel can give, and without which all other comfort and consolation is but an empty name. If all our sins were laid upon Christ our Surety, then 'they were taken off' from us; and consequently, sin shall never bring into condemnation the believer in Jesus, for whom He was thus oppressed and afflicted.

We now pass to a consideration of the soul-depression which the Son of God endured beneath this burden. All sin brings its consequent sorrow. Sin is a violation of the law of God; and so obnoxious is it to the holy God, that, as we cannot cast the smallest pebble into a tranquil lake without disturbing its repose, so we cannot in the slightest degree run counter to God's law without dishonoring God and compromising the peace of our own soul. Now, from this passage we may argue- What must have been the soul-sorrow of the Son of God when He stood, as the Surety and Substitute, beneath the weight of all the sins and transgressions of His people?

My reader, what is it that darkens the spirit? What is it that gives the bitterest ingredient to the cup of sorrow? Is it not your daily conflict with sin? And yet your sins are pardoned; they are blotted out, and forever cancelled. We should do injustice to you, and a still greater wrong and dishonor to Christ, were we to conceal or shade the fact in our deepest distress for sin, that we have to deal with sin, the commission of which is forgiven, the guilt of which is cleansed, the curse and condemnation of which are entirely and forever removed.

But what must have been the soul-distress and oppression of Jesus when there were made to meet upon Him the accumulated sins of the whole family of God? Truly might it be said, "He was oppressed, and He was afflicted." This, then, was the cause of Christ's sorrow He was oppressed. And who can tell what deep mental and heart oppression the Savior endured while passing through that scene of trial? Oh, what is our oppression compared with the oppression of the Savior's holy soul, when paying the penalty of our transgressions and sins? Divine Justice was exacting from Him the utmost farthing of the great debt.

But He was afflicted too. Yes, His whole life was a life of affliction. Every step He trod, from the lowly manger to the ignominious cross, was marked by affliction. He was "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." He was born to trial and conflict. It is well for us that it was so. Who could enter into our oppression but the Lord! Our Savior in His distress, knowing there was no creature that could help Him, cries up God. And to whom could you flee in your oppression, to whom could you repair in your affliction, if not unto Him whose spirit, whose heart, was so afflicted? O you sons and daughters of sorrow, affliction, and trial; press the comfort and consolation of this truth to your

hearts- Jesus Christ was oppressed and afflicted, and He knows how to enter into all your oppressions, your mental and spiritual dejection and sorrow. The gloom that often broods around your soul, the nervousness which often unhinges your whole frame, the affliction that embitters your cup of sweets, He passed through, that He might be able to support us. He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, that He might know how to sympathize with the afflictions of His suffering family.

We would now direct your thoughts to the deportment of our blessed Lord while passing through this season of oppression and affliction. "He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth." Here is a great truth for us to consider, an important lesson for us to learn, and a bright example for us to study: "He opened not His mouth." There was a deathlike silence, a mute, yet not a sullen, submission of the soul beneath the sorrow He was enduring. Not a word was spoken; not a sentence was uttered; not a whisper was heard. "He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth."

And now, may the Spirit of God enable us to understand something of the deep spiritual significance of these words, "Yet He opened not His mouth." In the first place, our suffering Messiah, our afflicted Surety, did not impeach the justice of God in the soul-discipline through which He was passing. There was no arraignment at His bar of the righteousness of the judgment. He saw it to be equitable, just, and holy. He seemed to say, "Why should I complain of this bitter cup? Why should I murmur at this terrible affliction? I became a Surety for my Church. I gave myself up as a Substitute. It is an equitable obligation to which I bound myself; and I have not a word to utter impeaching the righteousness of my Father in the trial through which I am passing."

And is God less just in His dealings with you, my reader? Is there anything in His conduct that can give you cause to impeach the Divine equity? What, will you dispute the holiness and integrity of the Judge of all the earth when He blows upon your beautiful flower, when he cuts down your tall cedar, or when He wounds you in the most sensitive part of your nature? Is God unrighteous, unjust, unholy, in any of His dealings with you? "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Bitter may be the cup you are called to drink, dark the cloud that flings its shadow upon your path, and most beloved the "Isaac" of your heart you are compelled to surrender; yet, you may exclaim with David, "I was dumb; I opened not my mouth, because You did it. You are too wise to err, too good to be unkind, too righteous, too just, too holy, to do wrong."

He did not open his mouth to impugn the goodness and love of God. He felt it was the conduct of Him who is essential goodness and essential love; therefore, He did not question these perfections of His heavenly Father. And shall you, shall I impugn the goodness of God when He sees fit to chasten and afflict? What? is He less kind, is He less good, when He touches your health, when He blows upon your enterprises, when He scatters your riches, bereaves your heart, places you in circumstances that are trying to bear, and deprives you of mercies which once you enjoyed? Is He less good, and kind and loving then?

Oh, forget not that it is said of your Lord and Savior, "He opened not His mouth." He did not question the goodness and love of His Father though He was oppressed. Oh no; God your Father is not less kind, is not less good, or less loving, even when you may be oppressed and afflicted. If you would be like Christ, you must be dumb and open not your mouth- a mute and patient sufferer.

Christ did not murmur at the affliction that lay upon Him. Not a word of rebellion or of fretfulness breathed from His lips. No thoughts were in His mind which, if uttered, would say, I could have arranged this more wisely and justly. I could have formed, and fashioned this or that with more skill and ingenuity than He has done it. If it had been left to my own choice, I would have selected for myself a better position than this" Oh no; "He opened not His mouth." He uttered not a murmur; no unhallowed fretting broke from His sealed lips. Oh, learn, you saints of God, to be like Jesus, repining and murmuring not when the hand of God is heavy upon you. Be still, and know that He is God.

Again, when He was falsely accused, maligned, insulted, and traduced; spat upon, scourged, and degraded; yet "He opened not His mouth" to threaten and denounce. There was no complaining, no threatening, no returning evil for evil. "When He was reviled, He reviled not again." Learn, oh you who suffer from the world, who endure reproach and ignominy for Christ's sake- learn to suffer all that God sees fit; willing, if need be, that your actions and motives shall be misunderstood and misinterpreted by others; willing to confide your character into the hands of Jesus, your Surety.

When man falsely accuses you, when the world maligns you, oh, learn to be quiet beneath it all; leave it with Him who judges righteously, and who has left you an "example" of meekness, patient endurance, and silence under accusation, and bids you, "follow His steps." He opened not His mouth. to vindicate His own innocence; He was falsely accused and slandered by malignant foes, though He was holy, harmless, undefiled, and, separate from sinners. But He opened not His mouth in self-vindication. He committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.

What a lesson do we learn here! If you act from right principles, and your character is approved of God, you need not be anxious to vindicate it before men. Leave it with the Lord. Your Counselor and Advocate is Jesus Christ. "Commit your way unto the Lord; trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass. And He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your judgment as the noonday."

There may be occasions when, to rebut a false accusation, and to vindicate our integrity and uprightness, we may meekly assert and establish our innocence. But this need not transgress the spirit of Jesus, who, "when He suffered, He threatened not, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously." It were best not to take our cause out of Christ's hands into our own. In spiritual, as in worldly litigation, it were wise not to be our own counselor, but to remember that the believer has an "Advocate with the Father, Jesus-Christ the righteous," a powerful and ever-successful Pleader.

I would remind you, in concluding the chapter, that this quietness of spirit under all circumstances produces a peaceful, happy mind. A quiet mind is a happy and peaceful one- a mind firmly stayed upon God under all those circumstances which are calculated to produce mental disquietude and distress. Such a believer feels that God is doing right whatever He does. His mind is kept in perfect peace, being stayed upon God. It is calm, tranquil, peaceful, whatever the stormy billows that ruffle and agitate life's surface.

A state of mute submission is also a most instructive state to the mind. I believe we learn more in a state of quietness than in a state of excitement. God may teach you in the quiet more deeply than in the turmoil and bustle. Look at Jesus in His teaching of His disciples. He propounded to them

some great and precious parables which He would explain and unfold as they were able to bear it. How did He this? Was it amid the din and confused noise of the world? No; He took them apart from the multitude, and in the quietness and repose of the desert, he expounded to them the deep mysteries of the kingdom of God. "And when they were ALONE, He explained to them the parables."

Then, shrink not from the privacy of the closet, from the quietude of the sick chamber, or from the stillness of some remote scene; where, perchance, you may be deprived of the privileges of the house of God. Shrink not from solitude and retirement. God has put you there to teach you what He would not teach you amid the noise and tumult of the world. He has led you to close searchings of heart, to a more attentive and a more prayerful reading of His blessed Word, and more deeply into the secret of His covenant, and taught you more experimentally and perfectly, the all-important truths of the gospel of Christ.

Oh then, cultivate still more this quietness, this muteness of soul in suffering. We live in an age of action rather than of thought; of external excitement rather than of calm, meditative retirement. There may be much self-denying labor for others, while yet leanness may steal into your own soul, and the love of God wane within your heart. Study to be quiet, and cultivate communion and close communion with God, and commune with your own heart and be still.

Oh, cultivate the habit of self-examination! Look well into the state of your own soul. Sitting in lowliness and quietness at the Savior's feet, let your silence be a profound meditation upon your own heart as upon His; and let your mouth be sealed with perfect submission under the dealings of your heavenly Father, feeling that all those dealings are right, and all in love. Then, oh! then you will know in some degree what that repose and quietness of soul is which the Savior felt when oppressed and afflicted for your sins. "Yet He opened not His mouth."

"Be still, my soul! Jehovah loves thee;

Fret not, nor murmur at your weary lot;

Though dark and lone your journey seems to be,

Be sure that you are never by Him forgot.

He ever loves; then trust Him, trust Him still,

Let all your care be this- the doing of His will."

"Your hand in His, like fondest, happiest child,

Place you, nor draw it for a moment thence;

Walk with Him, a Father reconciled,

Until in His own good time He call you hence;

Walk with Him now, so shall your way be bright,

And all your soul be filled with His most glorious light"

"He comes with His reward; it is just at hand;

He comes in glory to His promised throne;
My soul rejoice before long your feet shall stand
Within the city of the Blessed One
Your perils past, your heritage secure,
Your tears all wiped away, your joy forever sure."

The Believer's Consecration to Christ

The Believer's Consecration to Christ

'But first gave their own selves to the Lord.' - 2 Corinthians 8:5

It is not only the design, but it is the effect of the gospel of Christ in the heart of man to diffuse itself. Implanting a new principle of love, and subjugating the renewed powers of the soul to the glory of God, the believer from that moment ceases to be his own. If our professed religion has not done this, it has done but little for us. There was this great distinguishing characteristic in the religion of these Corinthians, notwithstanding the many defects of some, and the unholy walk of others, for, though the most gifted, they were the least sanctified of all the apostolic churches; it is recorded that, before they gave themselves to one another in church-fellowship, "they first gave themselves to the Lord."

Let us consider this ACT of consecration to Christ- the MOTIVES which urge it- and some of the BLESSINGS which are its holy result. A casual survey of the world will convince any reflecting mind, that the great mass devote and lend themselves to any and every thing but to Christ. The world consecrates itself to itself, to mammon, to the creature, to ambition, to pleasure. Each individual weaves a garland for himself, that fades even while the hand entwines it on the brow. Such is the nature and such the end of all worldly honor! What an awful world! How ought we to look upon it with a tearful eye, with a compassionate, prayerful mind! Although beyond our power, except instrumentally, to convert, yet ought we not to regard it with that spiritual sensibility with which the Savior wept over Jerusalem?

But there are those who devote themselves to a higher and nobler object. We are to speak, in this chapter, of a few who are consecrated to the Lord- "They first gave their own selves." I must assume, and rightly too, that the subjects of this holy consecration have received Jesus as made unto them of God "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." Upon this foundation they dedicate their lives by an act of unreserved consecration unto the Lord. Mark what they consecrate- "their own selves." An individual may give a portion of his property, and a measure of his time, and yet withhold that from God which alone is acceptable- himself. Will God accept any other offering while the sacrifice of the heart is withheld? Impossible! "My son, give me your heart."

"God is love," and God has attached an importance and prominence to love that He has not done to anything else. "You shall LOVE the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your mind, and with all your soul, and with all your strength." This is God's first and great commandment. A man may stud the land with synagogues, and yet retain a heart of deadly and unsubdued enmity against God. But this is not the case with the true Christian; he has brought himself to the Lord. "Lord, this is all that I can do- I cast my own self on You. Splendid gifts I have none, gold and silver I have none; but I have a heart to love you; and now, Lord, I take that heart, just as it is, and I consecrate it to You."

Beloved reader, this is the sacrifice- this the homage of a true Christian. This is what God looks at, even the consecration of a man's self. Oh, lay that heart on His altar just as it is! It may be a broken heart; it may be a bleeding heart; a heart still conscious of infirmity and sin; yet you cannot lay a more precious or acceptable offering upon God's altar. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." Oh, what a lovely spectacle is it to behold a young believer just emerging from the world, and traveling to Calvary with a trembling yet decided step, and there consecrating himself to the Lord to be no longer his own, but Christ's. He consecrates his soul to the Lord, that the Lord may sanctify and mold it to His own image. He consecrates himself to Christ, that Christ may instruct, counsel, and guide him; and thus, by that act of consecration, he acknowledges and crowns Christ as his Prophet, Priest, and King.

Observe the priority of this consecration: "They first gave themselves to the Lord." What right has an individual to dispose of himself to any one before he gives himself to the Lord? My dear reader, your first act must be a personal, voluntary, and solemn dedication to the Savior. With what justice can you unite yourself, either to an individual or to the Church of God, before you have given yourself personally to Jesus?

Glance, now, at some of the motives which should move us to this self-consecration to the Lord. Christ will not receive a reluctant, an unwilling heart. It must, be a voluntary and loving surrender- a heart wrought upon by grace, and constrained by love. The right of priority which Christ has, weighs powerfully upon a renewed heart- "All souls are mine." Ah! it is a solemn thought, my unconverted reader, that God has a right of proprietorship in you, and will not forego that right for any individual in the universe. He has a right to your faculties, to your property, to your influence, to all you possess, and to all you are; nor will He release you from your obligation to glorify Him through all eternity. But oh, with what holy delight does a believing soul recognize the obligation- "Lord, I acknowledge Your right; I yield to it obedience, and henceforth I dedicate myself to You."

There is the feeling, too, of gratitude to Christ prompting the soul. When the believer considers what Christ has done for him- how the Savior went after him in the wilderness- drew him. to Himself- took all his sins- wept, suffered, and died for him; when he remembers what a fulness God has provided for him in Christ- "all fulness;"- when he thinks of all the glory He has laid up in heaven for him, his heart exclaims, "Lord, I am bound by the greatest obligations, the deepest gratitude, to dedicate myself to You."

But the greatest motive of all is, the love of Christ shed abroad in his heart. "The love of Christ constrains us," said the apostle; and the love of Christ forms the great, all-persuasive motive for a believer to yield himself to the Lord. Touched by the Savior's pardoning love- were it through fire or through water- he exclaims, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You lead- to service, to suffering, to death, if need be, for You have bought me with Your blood." " Here, Lord, I give myself away It is all that I can do." And if, my reader, these motives have been brought to bear, in any degree, upon your heart by the Holy Spirit, you can no longer refrain from giving yourself to Christ.

Trace some of the blessings which flow from this consecration to Christ. The first we quote is rest. The heart of the Christian, which has so long been a truant, wandering heart, at length finds rest, consequent upon this act of self-dedication to the Lord. After giving itself to God, the heart experiences a repose, a peace found nowhere else. Oh, the sweet repose the spirit is conscious of when it feels that the great question of possession is decided, and decided in favor of Jesus! It is a

rest which must be felt to be understood. That peace passes all understanding- the peace of knowing that now Christ possesses His own, that I no longer live to myself. It might have been at the cost of plucking out the right eye, the severing of the right hand; but oh, the peace it has brought! Now, Christ is loved supremely, and the heart is at rest from itself because at rest in Jesus.

Another blessing is safety. Speak of safety! There is no safety but that which is found in Christ. The individual who is consecrated to the Lord is safe. He has taken Christ as his counselor to guide him- as his shield to cover him- as his hiding-place to shelter him- as the Captain of his salvation to fight for him. Not a being in the universe so secure as he! He has become a subject of that kingdom which can never be moved.

In conclusion, let me ask, my reader, to whom are you consecrated? Think not that you occupy a position of neutrality. You are either consecrated to the Lord or you are antagonistic to the Lord. "He that is not with me is against me." Then, to whom have you consecrated your youth? your manhood? your hoary hairs? To whom have you consecrated yourself? Let the question haunt you until it has received a solemn and firm decision. But oh, let that decision be on the right side! "Henceforth I am the Lord's." The Lord loves an early consecration- a youthful consecration. He loves the young, the firstling of the flock. Let the young, then, ponder the question, "To whom shall I consecrate myself? to the creature or to Christ?" Descend, blessed Spirit, upon, the young, and constrain them to give themselves first to the Savior and then to His Church! Let the Christian give his whole heart to the Savior.

Are you so consecrated, saints of God? Then remember that all your concerns are the Lord's concerns. They more deeply concern Him than you. You have consecrated yourself to the Lord, and the Lord has accepted the offering, and has promised to take care of you, and at last will bring you to your eternal home. May we be enabled henceforth to renounce all our idol-rivals, and yield the throne supremely to Jesus. "For what agreement has the temple of God with idols? for you are the temple of the living God."

The vows of God are upon you. God give you grace to fulfil them! You have given yourself to the Lord; let nothing influence you to draw back. Oh, press onward! Christ's grace is sufficient for you. When tempted to stray, it will keep you; when you fall, it will raise you up; when weary and faint, it will restore and revive you. Distrust, yourself, abide in Christ; and if His chastening cleanses you from your idols, it will be but to reign Himself without a rival in your heart.

Christ's Consecration to the Believer

Christ's Consecration to the Believer

"The Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." - Galatians 2:20

In the preceding chapter we directed the reader to the subject of self-consecration to Christ, enforcing this duty by the example of the early Christians, who "first gave their own selves to the Lord." We pass, in the present chapter, to a higher contemplation than this- the consecration of Christ to the believer. "The Son, of God, who loved me, and GAVE HIMSELF for me." The first thought is, the love of the Son of God: "who loved me."

The love of any being, human or angelic, possesses a value which those who feel its magic power cannot resist. In proportion to the station of the individual, is our estimate of the condescension and greatness of his love. We are now to consider the affection, not of a mere created heart, but of the heart of a Divine Being, flowing in all its redundancy into our finite, sinful heart. The Being here represented to us is "the Son of God." He loved us. He could have no motive for loving us but what He found within Himself, seeing nothing in man but wretchedness and guilt. If, therefore, the Lord set His heart upon man, He must find the motive, not in the creature, but in Himself. Such, then; is the love of God. He loved man because He set His heart upon man.

But how shall we adequately describe this love? The love of Christ is a divine affection. It is the love of Him who is essential love- of Him who is the infinite Fountain of all love, the love that dwells in every heart. From this one fact we may infer, that it is an everlasting love. We must travel back to the beginning for this love of Christ to His Church, if, indeed, a beginning it had. It is an everlasting love: "I have loved you with an everlasting love." It is also a free, unpurchased love; a love flowing spontaneously from the heart of God- spontaneous in its act, and unconditional in its bestowment. Oh, how will this truth lighten and cheer the believer's dying hour! Then will the everlasting love of God, and the free grace of Christ, neutralize every doubt, quell every fear, and float the spirit on a sea of sunshine to glory.

If the Son of God loves us, it follows that the Father loves us. There are some who look so exclusively at the love of the Son as to overlook the love of the Father. Precious as is the love of our Savior, we must not rest in that, but pass on to the equal love of the Father. Oh, how it expands, how it exalts, how it ennobles our conception of this love to behold in every action that the Savior performed but the reflection of the love of the Father who gave His Son to die for us. The love of God to the Church is a love worthy of Himself. Beloved, when God metes out His love to His people, He metes out an affection which has no bound. Man is a dependent and limited being. No creature can give out of itself without expending and soon exhausting itself. The very love with which we love has a limit. But not so the love of God.

Consider, now, the evidence of the love of Christ to His Church. The evidence is, "He gave Himself." What greater proof of His love could He give than this? "Who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father."

Also, "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." "Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us." A climax to this, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it."

"Gave Himself!" Look for a moment at the immensity of the gift. What did our Lord give? Rather, what did He not give? He gave the merit of His obedience; and on the broad basis of that merit, the vilest sinner, believing in Christ, may draw near to God with boldness. Why is it that so many, whose Christianity we cannot question, are yet ever living in the region of doubt and fear? It is because they do not see that the Son of God has given His merit for their sins. Here is that which just meets our case, and which answers every objection. The righteousness that He wrought was not for His, but for our justification- a righteousness for our guilty soul. He gave, then, His merit. He gave His life. He gave His death.

That death was not for Himself. He gave His LIFE for you, and His DEATH for you. "He was bruised for our iniquities." He died that agonizing, that ignominious death, for you, O believing soul! Child of God, there is a place in heaven for you- a vacant seat- a mansion, which will remain until you rise to glory, and occupy it forever. That crown of glory none shall wear- that palm of victory none shall wave- that mansion of repose none shall occupy but you! Oh, was ever love like this! Herein, beloved, is love, and only here, that the Son of God gave Himself for us- to cancel our curse, to bear our sins.

But not only this, He gave Himself as our Brother born for adversity, as a Counselor, as a Guide, yes, as all that a poor, tried, tempted, needy saint requires on his way to heaven.

Then follows the believer's personal assurance of this great and blessed truth: "The Son of God, who loved ME, and gave Himself for ME." Here the apostle seems to forget the Church of God, and to think only for the moment of himself. "The Son of God, who loved ME, and gave Himself for ME." Saving faith converts a general, into a personal and particular truth. It firmly believes the general fact, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; and that belief imparts the assurance of a personal interest in the fact. I do not say that assurance is essential to our Salvation. But I do say that it is essential to a holy life and a happy death. If you earnestly desire both these, seek this assurance, and seek until you find it.

And now, in view of this most blessed theme, ought there not to be a renewed consecration of ourselves to Him who gave Himself for us? Shall we not, beloved, at the foot of the cross, yield ourselves afresh, to God? Saints! Priests of Christ! Are you so consecrating yourselves to the Lord? Are you writing "holiness to the Lord " on all you are and on all you have? I repeat the question, "To whom have you surrendered yourself?" If to Christ, then to Christ be your life devoted- living or dying, let it be Christ's. With the noble, magnanimous apostle let us exclaim, "FOR ME TO LIVE IS CHRIST, AND TO DIE IS GAIN."

Not Comfortless

Not Comfortless

"I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you." John 14:18

When Jesus spoke these words, the hearts of His disciples were filled with sadness. The anticipation of His departure from them flung a cold, dark shadow over all their future. What was the world to them now that their Lord and Friend was about to leave it? They were conscious of the grief and desolateness of orphans. They felt themselves alone; but how timely and how tenderly He had met their case: "I will not leave you comfortless" - orphans. With a heart like His, how could it be otherwise? His withdrawal was the occasion of their sorrow- could meet that sorrow but Himself? And how opportunely and effectively He came to their help! Will our Lord impose upon us a cross- lay upon us a burden- inflict a sorrow, and then leave us unsustained by His grace, unsoothed by His sympathy, uncheered by His love? Never! "I will come to you" is His precious declaration.

There are periods in the Christian life when comfort is especially needed; for these circumstances the Lord reserves His cordials. Thus, if Christ appears more loving and sympathizing at one time than another, it is not that there is any increase in His heart's tenderness, but simply a more timely and full unfolding of it. If, therefore, there should be any lengthened suspension of the comforts of the Holy Spirit, let us not infer that the heart of Jesus is chilled in its affection. He best knows our need and how to meet it. Like a skillful and watchful physician, He adapts the remedy to the case. We may imagine we needed a word of comfort, when we needed a word of rebuke; a promise, when we required a warning; a check, when we looked for an impulse.

We are best in the Lord's hands, assured that He will administer no stimulant or corrective, no discipline, be it humbling or exalting, but it will be just that which the state of our soul demands. If we need reproof, He will send it; if comfort, He will impart it; if instruction or guidance, there shall be no delay and no lack on His part. Oh, to enter more deeply into the Lord's love to His people.

We now turn to this sorrow of His disciples, which, He so timely and tenderly sought to comfort, and in which we shall find much analogous to our own. Their grief and despondency arose from the fact of Christ's withdrawal from them. They prized His presence too well to part with it without regret. What is the darkest shadow upon the heart of a believer in Jesus? Is it not the eclipse of the Sun of Righteousness in his soul- the withdrawal of the sensible presence of his Beloved? If we know what it is to lean upon Him, rest in Him, converse with Him, to walk in the light as He is in the light, it is utterly impossible that even its momentary suspension should not leave its shadow.

My reader, the greatest good, this side of glory, is the sense of the presence of Jesus. What, then, must its withdrawal be to the believer but an occasion of the deepest sorrow? Sometimes that sorrow is rendered more acute from the recollection of the cause of Christ's withdrawal: His Beloved was forced away. His ingratitude and backslidings caused Him to withdraw; and this fact

imparts intensity to the grief of a child of God. "Had it not been for my waywardness, He had not left me comfortless. My soul! it was your sin, your coldness, your neglect, which drove the Savior from your arms; and this is the bitterest ingredient in my cup of sorrow."

Perhaps the grief arises from the actual sense of the loss. He feels as if life were bereft of its sweetest, holiest charm. To this is added the fear, the haunting fear, that the Lord will not return to him again- that there will be no more such bright hours, no more sunny days- that now his Beloved, grieved and wounded, has taken His farewell, to return no more forever.

But now remark how graciously the Lord Jesus has anticipated, and how blessedly He has provided for this sorrow. The Lord will not leave His children orphans- that is, comfortless. A state of temporal orphanage is desolate- infinitely more a state of spiritual orphanage. "I will not leave you orphans. You shall not be lone and desolate, unshielded and comfortless. I know the shadow on your path, the sorrow of your heart, and I will, before I go hence, make provision for its need. I will not leave you comfortless."

And how does Christ meet this case? By teaching us to look up to God as our Father. He has put the words into your lips, "OUR FATHER, who is in heaven." Oh, remember, that when the consciousness of your desolate and lonely path fills you with gloom and despondency, it is your highest, sweetest privilege to draw near to God as to your heavenly Parent, and lean upon His heart as upon the heart of a loving Father; for God has not left you orphans. "Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." Oh, this is our highest comfort- our filial relation to God, and to His parental relation to us. If, then, He is your Father, honor Him by going to Him as a loving, trustful child for all the supplies you need.

For one moment let us refer to the crowning promise of the text, "I will come to you." Observe, the great comfort with which Jesus sought to solace them was, His certain and personal return. "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you." See how the Lord adapts His comfort to our sorrow. These disciples were mourning His absence from them. He assured them of His return. Oh, there is a beautiful and touching delicacy in Christ's comfort! He knows how to comfort.

Observe, again, the promise, "I will come to you." What a glorious light upon their gloomy path was this! "I will come to you." And does He not now come to us, beloved? Oh yes. He hastens to His people- comes to them in their sorrow. "For a small moment have I forsaken you; but with great mercies will I gather you." He returns to His wandering children, and heals their backslidings. He comes and dispels the clouds, and once more the sun shines upon their path. I may speak to some who have no light. My reader, Christ will not leave you comfortless; He will come to you. The light shall return, and the darkness withdraw.

But there is a reference in this promise to the Lord's Second Coming. "The coming of the Lord draws near." Personal and visible, He will appear the second time without sin unto salvation. It is but a little while and His glorious Advent will transpire. God is, by His providence, preparing the way of the Second Coming of the Lord. All the signs indicate its near approach. Oh, may we be found looking for, and hastening unto His coming.

In conclusion, receive the exhortation- let Jesus Christ be all in all to You! Oh, let nothing keep you from Christ and His comforts! Let no creature, or church, or ordinance, veil Him from your eye.

Press through all to Christ! Cleave to Him, for He alone can cheer, guide, sanctify, and comfort you. Draw all your supplies from Christ, and press the precious promise to your heart, "I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you."

The Man of God Sifted

The Man of God Sifted

"For, lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth." - Amos 9:9

God's Church has ever been a separate and scattered people. The apostle Peter recognizes this in the dedication of his First Epistle, "To the strangers scattered abroad." And yet, separated and dispersed though they are, like the Jews, they have never lost their peculiar and distinctive character. The "holy seed," mingled though it has with the world, growing up side by side with the tares, has ever maintained its essentially divine and holy character- uncorrupted and incorruptible- the precious seed of God's own right-hand planting. More than this, they have never been dispersed beyond the eye and the heart of the Lord their God. We may trace this truth in the history of nations. When God is about to bring some signal judgment upon an ungodly people; it has invariably been accompanied with an especial provision made on behalf of His elect. The subject we are about to consider is a remarkable illustration of this.

God was about to visit the Jewish nation by a process severely searching. And yet, the words which announce the judgment bring with it the mercy. While He sifts, He spares- while He searches, He protects. "Lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth." In considering this subject, the points for our study are- THE PRECIOUS SEED- THE SIFTING- and THE SECURITY.

THE PRECIOUS SEED-

There are various reasons why this figure should be employed to designate God's one Church, divided though it may be, into separate and distinct branches. It is not the least one, that God will put a marked difference spiritually between the Israelites and the Egyptians. It is the grand effort of Satan to counterfeit what is good, and blend it with evil. There is a striking passage bearing upon this in Isaiah 5:20, "Woe unto those who call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" There is that principle in our fallen and corrupt nature that is perpetually calling good evil, and evil good. Ah! it is a solemn thought, and it should cause us to tremble how we decide any point of doctrine or practice whatever for which we have not a "Thus says the Lord." But the Lord has put an essential and palpable difference between the Israelites and the Egyptians- the Church and the world. We have to do in this matter not with ministers, but with God; not with churches, but with the judgment-seat of Christ; and the moment is coming- oh, how fast it speeds!- when we shall have to test our creed, test our principles, test our Church, by God's unerring Word.

The figure, also, sets forth the beauty and excellence of the Church of God. By nature it is as others. There is a sinnership as well as a saintship in the character and history, of every believer. God forbid that we should merge the one in the other! We would never forget, in the highest view

the Spirit of God gives us of our saintship, no, nor even when "Abba, Father" is but lisped by our lip, the horrible pit from which sovereign grace has taken us. From the highest pinnacle in heaven we shall look down, and remember that we were once "children of wrath, even as others." But the Church of God is His especial treasure: "You only have I known of all the nations of the earth."

But the figure also illustrates the preciousness of the believer. No language can adequately set this forth. A precious Jesus has died for them- precious blood purchased them- a glorious righteousness covers them- the Holy Spirit dwells in them- and the mark of God is upon them. Who can compute the value of a soul that has upon it the blood of God's dear Son? Who can portray the beauty and holiness of a soul that stands before God complete in the righteousness of Christ, and enshrines God, the Holy Spirit? Truly they are the precious seed of the Lord.

The figure is also expressive of their fruitfulness. The chaff is not fruitful; it is only the true grain that has in it the germ of fruitfulness. We look for no spiritual fertility in an ungodly man. We do not expect to see the graces of the Spirit engrafted on a dead stock. We go to the living branch, to the soul that has union with Jesus, for the fruit of the Spirit. There alone will you find holy contrition, lovely lowliness, precious faith, divine love, high principles. There alone can we trace the evidence of that Divine grace that changes the heart, and imparts a new and a heavenly nature.

THE SIFTING-

But observe, God sifts His people like corn. We need scarcely remark upon the necessity of this process, it seems so palpable and self-evident. Take the holiest man of God for illustration. There is such a mixture of contradiction in him, that he needs to be winnowed. It has been remarked, "The best of saints are exposed to the worst of sins." Look at Job. Study his character, and then his sifting. "And the Lord said unto Satan, Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that fears God, and shuns evil." What a precious grain of wheat was here! yet, see how God put that grain of wheat into the sieve!

Who could have thought there would have been so much self-righteousness in Job, such hard thoughts of God? Who could have thought there had been so much chaff mixed with the wheat? But God sifts His wheat. The first great sifting is when the Holy Spirit separates a man from himself- when He dissolves his covenant with the law, and shows him the worthlessness of his own righteousness. The first step in conversion is not separation from the world, but from 'self'. We may carry our own righteousness into the loneliest desert. A man may separate himself from others, and may never be separated from himself. So long as we stand in our self-righteousness we are an offence to God. I do not hesitate to say, that a self-righteous man, a man going about to establish a righteousness of his own in opposition to the righteousness of Christ, is, with all his works, with all his charities, a greater offence to God than the poor outcast whose life is one mass of sin. A self-righteous man denies the holiness of Jehovah, turns his back upon the great work of God's dear Son, and expects to get to heaven on the basis of a human righteousness. But the Holy Spirit sifts a man, as corn is sifted; uproots his love of self, his trusting in good works, and lays the soul prostrate at the feet of Jesus.

See how the apostle was thus separated from himself: "What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a

righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith." My reader, have you been so separated from a righteousness to which you are so closely wedded by nature, but from which, if saved, you must be entirely divorced by grace?

With regard to the methods which the Lord adopts in this sifting process, we would first mention the Word. Oh, how searching and sifting is the Word of God! Who has not found it so? How it detects the latent principle of evil in the heart! The Word of God shows a man what he is- it rebukes, searches, and sifts him. Blessed is that man who knows what the siftings of God's Word are; who is willing to have his principles and conduct tried by it, and whose ardent desire is, "Lord, sanctify me through Your truth."

Sanctified trial is another mode. Ah, what a mighty fan is this with which God winnows His people! He leads them about, sends cross providences, dark dispensations, thwarted designs, blasted hopes, and the precious grain is driven about, wondering what will be the issue. Messenger follows messenger; bearing tidings of woe still more lamentable than the former, and the poor afflicted believer stands appalled, and marvels what the Lord means by all this trial and sifting. But oh, what a blessed result!

Seasons of trial are searching, sifting, and separating seasons. God designs by that trial not to wound you; oh, no! there is too much love in His heart to put you to needless pain; but to separate the precious wheat from the refuse- to scatter the chaff that has mingled with the divine grain, concealing and deteriorating it. Yes, many a child of God living much in the region of the world, and often, perhaps, yielding to its temptations, has been placed by God in this sieve. We have gone and wept when we ought to have rejoiced with him. He has come out, oh what a different character! What a higher tone it has given to his spirituality. How dead he seems to the world! He acts, and speaks, and prays like another man. Why? God has sifted him! The chaff has been separated, the storm has scattered it, and the image of God has been brought out in all its true beauty and power.

Satan's temptations, too, may also be spoken of as a sifting process. Christ said to Peter, "Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat." Oh, what a sifting process did he pass through! And if grace had not been in him, what would have become of Peter when thrice he denied his Lord? But oh, how the chaff vanished! What a different man was he after that sifting process! We do not say these are pleasant seasons; but we do say, blessed is the man that is tempted! We do not hear of Satan desiring to sift Judas; but he seizes upon the precious grain. There was something to sift in Peter; there was nothing to sift in Judas. If we speak to any who are the marks of Satan's fiery darts, let us meet you with this consolation- it is only the true wheat Satan seeks to sift. Notwithstanding all this, not one grain shall perish. It is just the truth we need.

THE SECURITY-

After the great searching, there comes the declaration that allays all our alarm, and fills us with joy and gladness, "Yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth." Not a particle of the work of God in the soul thus sifted shall perish. It is utterly impossible it should be so. It cost God too much. Peter lost not one grain when his faith was sifted: "I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not;" and you can answer; when God has carried you through dark and deep waters, have you lost anything

worth retaining? You may have lost your worldliness and self-confidence; but was that worth retaining? Has Christ ever become less dear to you? Has the throne of grace become less attractive to you? Has the onward path of holiness been less dear to you? Have the saints of God become less lovely to you? Has the Word of God become less sweet to your taste? Oh no! not one grain has fallen to the earth of that Divine grace the Holy Spirit has planted in your soul.

What secured it? They are the beloved of God, and He keeps them; they are the redeemed of Christ, and He secures them to eternal glory. The indwelling of the Spirit secures them. He has taken possession of them forever; and Satan and sin can no more destroy them than they can destroy the being of Jehovah. You may deem this strong language, my reader; but it is strong truth. The day is coming that will sift our Christianity, our religion, and our principles; and woe be to that man that is not held by this threefold power, which alone can keep the believer in the time of trial that is coming upon this world!

The great question arises, What am I? You may have a religion; so has the Pagan. You may have your forms of religion; so has the Papist. You may have your lamp of profession; so had the five foolish virgins. But if God were now to put you into His sieve and test you by His Word, by His law, by His gospel, do you think there would be any precious grain left? Anything that would smooth your last illness, disarm death of its sting, and rob the grave of its terrors? Do you think there would be anything left but the chaff? Oh, search your heart, dear reader! Put the question honestly to your conscience, "What is sin to me? What is God's dear Son to me?" Try yourselves by Jesus. Oh, if you are nothing but chaff, your religion nothing but chaff, your hope nothing but chaff, what will be the solemn issue?

To God's saints would we say- do not shrink from the Lord's siftings. It is but the precious seed the Lord tries. "Search me, O Lord, and try me. I want to be honest and real. I desire whatever is not like Christ to be consumed."

Oh, what a volume of meaning is contained in that word "yet." "Yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth"- not a particle shall perish; but it shall be preserved and treasured up, and every grain will the Lord place in His garner in the world of everlasting glory. God grant, dear reader, that this may be our happy experience!

Christ Our Joy

Christ Our Joy

"You have sorrow now, but I will see you again; then you will rejoice, and no one can rob you of that joy." John 16:22

In a preceding chapter of this work we adverted to the removal of Christ from His disciples as constituting a cause of deepest sorrow. We purpose, in the present chapter, to speak more fully of the joy with which our blessed Lord sought to counterbalance that grief. It is couched in the promise, "I will see you again." And yet, in the first gush of their sorrow, how entirely they overlooked the blessings enshrouded in this dark cloud! On His return to the Father His whole priesthood, as an Intercessor, depended. His great work of advocacy, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and all the untold blessings which should accrue to the Church from the abiding indwelling of the Holy Spirit, were suspended upon this one fact in our Lord's history- His retirement from His Church on earth, and His reunion with the Church in heaven.

Thus, dear reader, is it with us. The cloud which shades us, the event which seems the most painful, is often that which, in its issue, is productive of the greatest blessing. But observe how our Lord sought to adapt Himself to the circumstances of His Church: "You have sorrow now, but I will see you again; then you will rejoice, and no one can rob you of that joy." Let us take each particular as it lies before us.

It was no ordinary sorrow which now pressed upon their hearts. Filled as the world was with sorrow at that moment- many eyes weeping, many spirits crushed to the earth- no sorrow could be compared with that which now bowed the hearts of this little band of disciples. What a poor, desolate wilderness did the world now appear to them. Their sun was retiring, and their hearts, like flowers which close when the light withdraws, were draped in shadows. Thus is it with saints of God who are in the habit to sun themselves with the presence of Jesus, and to have their hearts filled with that joy and gladness which flows only and entirely from Him.

When Jesus retires, the heart is closed, and no other joy can inspire and open it. Beloved, this is not unusual. What is Jesus to a spiritually enlightened, believing sinner? He is all in all. Earth would be nothing to him but for Jesus. And what would heaven be without Jesus? Christ is the sun of heaven, the glory of heaven, the bliss of heaven, the heaven of heaven. Oh, could we now part the veil- it will soon rise- what a spectacle would burst upon our view! One object, glorious and exalted, alone fixes the gaze, and myriads of happy spirits encircle Him, as satellites clustering around the sun. Every eye is fixed upon Him- every heart loves Him, and He is the theme of every song that floats from their lips. Is Jesus less dear, less precious to the saints of God on earth? Oh no! He stands to us in the relation of the Consolation of Israel, the Brother, the Friend, the Redeemer, the Intercessor. We cannot dispense with a single office that Jesus fills. We cannot part with one view the Holy Spirit gives us of His fitness and excellence. Jesus is all that we want.

Is it, then, unusual that, when Christ's absence is felt, there should be sorrow? Dear saints of God, this is a test of your Christianity. There are many who can talk well of Christ, and who can repeat Scripture fluently; and yet with all this they may pass days, weeks, months, and years, and know nothing of what that sorrow is which flows from the conscious absence of Jesus. Do you ask why? Simply because they do not know what the presence of Jesus is. Satisfied with an enlightened understanding, with an external ordinance, with an orthodox creed, and knowing not what it was to hold communion and fellowship with Christ, they do not know what that sorrow is that springs from His absence. Consequently, time rolls on and they are utter strangers to this joy of the Lord.

There is one feature we must not overlook- our Lord's notice of their sorrow. Was He indifferent to it? Did He close His heart to it? When did He ever do so? Dear saints of God, the Man of sorrows cannot be indifferent to the sorrows of man. The Prince of sufferers cannot turn away from the sufferings of His people. Jesus knows His people's sorrow. He is acquainted with their grief. He has, so to speak, a bottle for their tears, and a book for their sighs. What! does He preserve them? So precious are they, that they cannot be lost, so dear are they, that they cannot be unobserved. Ah, beloved! Jesus knows our sorrow. Do you think that He is indifferent to you, you weepers at the tomb of an absent Savior- you earnest seekers after Christ, who watch for Him more eagerly and ardently than the weary sufferer watches through the slow hours of his sleepless night for the first break of day?

There is yet another feature exceedingly sweet. Jesus speaks of their sorrow as being a present sorrow. "You now have sorrow." Oh yes! the sorrow of the saint of God, be it what it may, is but a present sorrow. It will soon pass away. Everything here is present. The world is a present evil world- mutability is written upon it all. Its fashions change, its pleasures change, the lusts of the world pass away, its glory fades; yes, and the sorrow of the tried believer is but a present sorrow, and will soon dissolve into happiness and glory forever.

Now, observe the blessed truth by which our Lord promises them a return of joy. "I will see you again." There is a sense in which Jesus never loses sight of His people. We have lost sight of Him times without number; but we have never been out of His eye- no, not a moment: "He withdraws not His eye from the righteous." And in speaking of His vineyard, the Church, it is said, His eye is upon it from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.

But here is a reference to the restored presence of Jesus in order to the restored joy of His disciples. How truly did our Lord fulfil this promise in His resurrection, "I will see you again!" He did see them again after His resurrection, and was with them forty days. What a joyous period was that! "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord." Can we possibly conceive what the joy of the disciples was when they saw their Lord return back from the grave? For three days their joy was entombed, but it was buried only to rise again with increased intensity. Has the Lord ever taken a blessing that He has not more than restored? When the disciples saw His mangled and lifeless body lowered into that tomb, and the stone rolled upon it, they might have thought that in that tomb was buried all their joy forever. But when Jesus rose again, their joy rose with Him; and that joy was a richer, deeper joy than they ever knew before.

O beloved! have we not experienced a joy kindred to this when our absent Savior has drawn near, and once more manifested Himself to us? Oh, how the lost joy has come back again, richer, deeper, and sweeter than before! The very absence of the Savior has but made His presence all

the sweeter. Yes, "I will see you again" is still the watchword of the Lord's people. "For a small moment have I forsaken you, but with great mercies will I gather you. In a little wrath I hid my face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer." "Thus says the Lord, I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies." Oh, what a truth! I am returned to Jerusalem- with what? with vengeance, because Jerusalem rejected Me, and crucified Me? Oh no! "I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies." Lift up your head, poor mourner, sorrowing bitterly that you have so grieved your Lord that He has suspended His presence. Look up with this precious promise, "I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies."

But this promise of our Lord is yet to receive a fuller and sublimer fulfilment. We look for His Second Coming. The words, "I will see you again," include His glorious Epiphany, when this same Jesus will personally appear in the clouds of heaven, accompanied by the saints who are dead, and to translate the saints who are living. Thus is this glorious truth stated: "Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever."

O animating, O holy, O precious truth! O bright and cheering prospect of the coming of our blessed Lord and Savior to see us! Then, indeed, our heart shall rejoice. If the present imperfect view of Jesus fills us with such joy and gladness, oh, what will be the ecstasy of joy when we shall see Him in the clouds of heaven, and exclaim, "Lo, this is my Redeemer: I have waited for Him; I will be glad and rejoice in Him! "

Now observe the permanence of this joy. "And your joy no man takes from you." How transient was the joy of the chief priests and scribes, who vainly thought that when they had slain the Prince of Life they had completely triumphed over the young religion! But oh, how short-lived was their exultation! Jesus came back to life, and, by His resurrection, confirmed and established the faith of His disciples, and no man could take their joy from them.

Our Lord seems to suppose here that the joy of His people would be imperilled; and so it is. Satan would rob us of it if he could. Perpetually is the devil suggesting such thoughts of Christ, of God, and of His word, as would greatly dampen, if not entirely destroy our joy. So would evil men. But so real and permanent is the joy the Lord gives the believer, that neither Satanic suggestion, nor the persecutions of evil men, can possibly take it away. If it were possible to separate us from Christ- for He is our Joy- then were it possible to rob us of this spiritual blessing. But who shall separate the believer from the love of Christ? Your joy "no man [Greek, no power] takes from you."

But have you lost the sensible experience of the joy of the Lord through the prevalence of unbelief, or unevenness of walk? Return to Jesus with David's prayer, "Restore unto me the joy of Your salvation." What does Jesus say? "I will see you again." And you shall see Jesus again with a freshly-anointed eye of faith; and, looking off from yourself to Him, your joy shall be full, and that joy no power shall take from you.

Sin Confessed and Forsaken

Sin Confessed and Forsaken

Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord"— and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Psalms 32:5

The great controversy which God has with man is that which concerns His own holiness. God is essentially holy, and He has exhibited and shielded His holiness at the expense of His heart's dearest treasure- the sacrifice of His beloved Son, upon whom He laid the iniquities of His people. The great end of all His dealings with His saints is to bring them into the deeper experience of this truth- to know, to confess, and to forsake sin: "By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged; and this is all the fruit to take away his sin." And this is the blessed end of His chastenings, even for "our profit, that we might be made partakers of His holiness."

But there is a beautiful connection here which we wish in this chapter to illustrate- the relation of confession and forgiveness of sin: "I said, I will confess, and You forgave." A subject entering more deeply into spiritual religion does not invite our attention than this. You will observe that a heartfelt acknowledgment of sin to God is closely connected with His full, free, and immediate remission of that sin. Men endeavor to sever these two by substituting a general and spurious acknowledgment of sin, and so cherish a general and spurious notion of the pardon of sin. But what God has thus joined He will never disannul. He will bring it home to the consciences of His own people, that a true, heartfelt acknowledgment of sin shall ever be connected with a clear sense of the full forgiveness of that sin. We consider the subject in its three particulars: penitence- confession- forgiveness.

PENITENCE-

Language could not be stronger in expressing the deep conviction of sin as employed in this passage. David seems to exhaust the vocabulary of words: "my sin" "my iniquity" "my transgression" and, as if to crown it, "the iniquity of my sin." Here was no floating upon the surface of sin. Here was no attempt at that refining away of sin by those nice distinctions which some minds are prepared to make. Here was no scanning the sin of others, which the great mass are so ready to do, to the blinding and hindering of their own.

Mark this, my reader, that man who is most ready to uncover the sin of another, is the most ready to conceal his own. The Pharisee had many stones to cast at the poor trembling woman whom they dragged into Christ's presence, but not one to cast at themselves! But when Jesus turned the light in upon their own consciences, in a moment they were silent, and went out one by one and left the guilty accuse in the presence of the Righteous and Saving One.

The great mass of men know nothing of sin. It is appalling to think that the great and the only controversy God has with men, men are ignorant of. What is that controversy? It is sin. Why famine? why pestilence? why war? The answer is sin. If He touches you in your property, in your

family, or in your person, it is because of sin, and the fruit of it all is to bring you to know and to acknowledge how exceedingly sinful you are in His sight. And you have lost the great end He had in all His dealings with you if they result not in the prostration of your whole soul before God under a sense of your vileness. For what was the law of God revealed? To demonstrate His holiness "By the law is the knowledge of sin." What is the end of the gospel? To reflect His holiness still more gloriously. Bright as is the mirror of the law, the gospel is still brighter, in which we see how infinitely, gloriously holy is the Lord God. Take the sacrifice of His Son- there is the most glorious unfolding of man's sinfulness and God's holiness. When He took that sinless Lamb, that impeccable Savior, bound Him upon the altar of justice, and consumed Him with the fire of His wrath- oh, it was to demonstrate to this guilty world that He was a God of spotless holiness, and man was a hell-deserving sinner, and could not be saved but as the innocent suffered for the guilty!

But now let us turn to the case of David. Oh, what music God brought out from his sorrowful soul! It is delightful to see what a personal matter David made of it. My sin- my iniquity- my transgression- the iniquity of my sin. Our sins cannot be charged to another, except only, in simple faith, to Him who bore them as our Divine Surety. The sinner is accountable to God for his own transgressions, and shall be finally dealt with- saved or condemned- upon his own individual responsibility. This is one sign of true repentance- for a man to see his sin to be his own, and to be brought to lay his mouth in the dust before God, and to acknowledge it, and say, "My sin."

Let us now turn to the penitential acknowledgment of David of his sin to the Lord. He confessed his sin: "I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord." The frequent mention by the Holy Spirit of this Christian duty, the relation in which it stands to the glory of God, and the immense blessings of which it is the channel, mark it as a matter of the greatest moment. Yet, even in the Church of God, we know of no spiritual duty upon the surface of which Christians more rest, more set aside and overlook, than this one- the confession of sin to God.

We cannot but mark the hesitancy of David's mind, and consequent anguish of his soul, before he was brought to this acknowledgment: "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer."

"When I kept silence,"- when he hid his sin, and refused to acknowledge it, then did all the anguish of his soul come in like a flood. Do not overlook this feature. It may be a word of comfort to some who scan this page. He was brought to this acknowledgment with great reluctance and hesitancy; it was not until God, as it were, placed him upon a rack. If you are wise and thoughtful to learn, you will see a volume of most blessed truth in this.

But he was now brought to acknowledge his sin. Oh, how forcible his language! It sets forth the character of his sin: "I acknowledge my sin; mine iniquity have I not hid: I will confess my transgression;" as if he would exhaust all language in setting forth the deep sense he had of the blessedness of unveiling his heart before God in confession of sin. He did not conceal his sin, as did Achan; he did not deny it, as did Ananias and Sapphira; he did not extenuate it, as did Adam; but he frankly, fully, and freely acknowledged it. We have a striking reference to Adam's attempted concealment of his sin in Job 31:33. Job is speaking of his frank acknowledgment of sin; he says, "If I covered any transgressions as Adam, by hiding my iniquity in my bosom." Now, the whole

posterity of Adam just do as he did: they wrap up their sins in their bosom- a sure evidence that they belong to him. Beloved, sin creates a shyness of God. Why did Adam wrap up his sin? He was afraid of God- he shrunk from God's presence and eye. Oh yes! there is a tendency to this in every child of God. When guilt is on the conscience, he loses the filial nearness he once had, and, as it were, hides himself from God, and does not fully confess to God his sin.

In explaining what true confession of sin is, I would remark, that the confession of many is no confession at all. Do you ask me why? Because it is not a minute, honest, frank acknowledgment of sin to God. What does God say? "Blessed is the man in whose spirit there is no deceit." Here, observe, deceit is spoken of in connection with the acknowledgment of transgression. How much deceit there may be in many of us in confession of sin to God, He only knows. We cannot but think there was some latent guile in Moses' confession to God in Exodus 4. God bid him go to Egypt. Moses excuses himself: "Lord, I am not eloquent; but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue." This was his excuse. But God knew there was something that he had not honestly, fully confessed. What was it? God tells him, "Go, return to Egypt, for all the men are dead which sought your life." Here was the secret wherefore he hesitated to go. It was unbelieving fear- an unmanly trembling for his life. God will have no reserves in our confessions to Him of sin. He will have us open all our hearts to Him in the same confidence with which He has opened His.

But overlook not this truth, for it is of great moment- one individual may take up the confession of another, and yet be a total stranger to true confession. It was a law, under the Levitical economy, that if a man touched only the waters of purification in which another had been cleansed, he was unclean. Now, just what the waters of purification were, is the confession of sin. A man may adopt another's confession of sin, quote his language, and counterfeit his spirit, and yet be utterly unacquainted with a genuine sense and acknowledgment of sin before God. I may breathe the publican's prayer, the briefest, yet the most comprehensive of all prayers; but if I have not his prostration of spirit, his profound sense of vileness, his sincere penitence, what does it avail me? On the contrary, is there not a fearful augmentation of guilt, an enormous increase of iniquity, in adopting a form of confession while destitute of real brokenness of heart?

Having endeavored to lay before the reader in what true confession of sin consists, let me place before him, in two or three points of light, the true posture of CONFESSIO. We find it in Leviticus 16:21 "And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness." Behold the posture! the hands laid upon the head of the live goat, and so confessing sin. The gospel of this is glorious! What is the true posture for confessing your sin but laying your hand of faith upon Christ himself? It is beneath the cross of the Incarnate God that true confession is made- with the eye of faith upon the great oblation for that very transgression which we honestly and penitentially confess.

That is a striking passage in Hosea 14:1: "O Israel, return unto the Lord; for you have fallen by your iniquity." How shall I return? comes the question from the heart. The answer is, "Take with you words." What words? Oh, take with you the words of God himself. Tell Him He has given His Son to die for sinners; tell Him there is pardon for the vilest in the blood of the Savior; and remind Him of His promises of forgiveness to the humble and the penitential soul.

Beloved, great are the blessings which spring from confession of sin. Would you know the believer who has the most tender conscience, who most earnestly desires to walk uprightly, closely, holily with God? I would unhesitatingly point you to him who is much at God's confessional; who has his hand much upon the head of the Lamb; who is much where the purple stream flows; in other words, who is much in the confession of sin. He is the most searching, self-examining man; his conscience is the most tender, his enjoyment is the richest.

Oh, it is utterly impossible for a child of God to be found much in the confession of sin- of what are called little sins- and not walk with a tender, honest conscience. Oh, there are no little sins! If there were a little God, if there were a little Savior, if there were a little hell, there would be little sins! There are no little sins with God. But for a child of God to confess what are called little sins- sins which some consider as no sins, transgressions which are overlooked as the violation of human laws only, but which involve principles hostile to his own soul and to God's glory- he is the one who knows what the happy walk is.

FORGIVENESS-

This brings us to the comfort which David felt in connection with, the confession of his sins. How expressive are his words: "I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and You FORGAVE the iniquity of my sin." Ah! had he not so long kept silence, but come at once to the confession of sin, he would not have known the deep anguish he experienced. In asserting the relation which exists between the confession of sin and its pardon, let me not be misunderstood. The confession of sin is not the cause of its pardon- the moving cause is God's free, unmerited grace; it is the blood of Jesus. God pardons from the fulness of His mercy, and on the ground of the Savior's sacrifice.

But the confession of sin is the channel by which God speaks comfort to the soul. There are several examples in which this is strikingly illustrated. "And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord"- there was the acknowledgment. "And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also has put away your sin"- there was the forgiveness. That, too, is a striking passage- "I have declared my ways, and You heard me." I declared my ways- I confessed my sin; my ways have been crooked, but I declared them, and You heard me. Oh, what a God thus to bow down His ears to such an acknowledgment!

Those are precious words in John's epistle, "If we CONFESS our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." Believer in Christ! this is one of the most precious truths that could engage your thoughts- the connection between the honest and heartfelt acknowledgment of sin, and God's full and free forgiveness written upon the conscience. When was it the father rose to welcome home his child? was it not when he said, "I will arise, and go to my father, and will say to him, I have sinned?" The moment the father heard the echo of his voice, he went out, and advanced to meet and welcome back his child. If you want to know the sense of pardoned sin in your conscience, you must know what the honest and sincere confession of that sin is beneath the cross.

In closing, let me remark, that it is possible this subject may address itself to those who are living in a mere formal confession of sin. Do not over look our reference to the waters of purification. Beware of mere cold, premeditated forms of confession! Multitudes use them without any

enlightened sense, with no real or true acknowledgment of sin. Do not be deceived. You may read Daniel's confession over and over again without Daniel's repentance. You may repeat the publican's prayer a thousand times, and know nothing experimentally of the publican's real confession.

Have you really felt your sins to be a burden? Have you truly felt the plague of your heart? If so, you will not rest in a mere form of acknowledgment, but will find thoughts, and feelings, and words welling up from the lowest depths of your soul, to express to the Lord that you feel yourself to be a poor, hell-deserving sinner; casting yourself upon the mercy of God in Christ Jesus.

This subject, also, may address itself to many who are entire strangers to all confession of sin whatever- who have never really bent the knee before God in prayer and contrition for sin. But oh, living and dying without a real conviction and confession of sin before God, hell must be your portion! There is no escaping this awful conclusion. No man enters heaven who has not found, beneath the cross, the ear of a sin-pardoning God; who has not laid his hand of faith on the head of the atoning Lamb, acknowledging his guilt, and accepting in faith the blood that effaces it.

To God's saints would I say, In all your sins and conscious departures be beforehand with Satan. Do you ask what I mean? Satan is the great accuser of the brethren; and if you do not accuse yourself, Satan will accuse you, and you know what his accusations are! Go and accuse yourself before God; give your adversary no opportunity, but, anticipating his indictment, go and confess your sins before the Lord; and oh, you shall know what it is to meet the glance of a sin-pardoning Father, and shall know the "blessedness of the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered."

To this thought we would add a kindred one: By this confession of sin you will disarm God of His judgments; for, "if we judge ourselves," says the apostle, "we shall not be judged." If you do take the judgment-seat against yourself, you shall stay His chastening hand; for all His corrections are to this end, that you may see and acknowledge yourself to be a sinner. What was the end of all Job's trials? It was found in one brief expression: "I am vile; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." But if you are found confessing sin, not wrapping it up in your heart, but going to the slain Lamb, traveling to the blood of atonement, and, as a child, opening all your heart to God, God will stay His chastening hand, and, instead of covering you with the dark cloud of His anger, He will sun you with the radiant smile of His love.

Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord"— and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

"ONLY ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR INIQUITY." Jeremiah 3:13.

The Man of God under Reproach

The Man of God under Reproach

Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God. Selah. But thou, O Lord, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head. Psalms 3:2-3

Many are saying of me, "God will not deliver him." But you are a shield around me, O Lord; you bestow glory on me and lift up my head. Psalms 3:2-3

So many are saying, "God will never rescue him!" But you, O Lord, are a shield around me, my glory, and the one who lifts my head high. Psalms 3:2-3

Here was a man of God in circumstances of, perhaps, one of the keenest trials that could touch the heart. What was David's position when he breathed out his soul thus to God? He was a fugitive from his throne, a wanderer from his kindred- the son of his heart, his idolized Absalom, plotting treason against the kingdom, and thirsting to imbrue his hands in his parent's blood. Leagued in this plot were his confidential counselors and bosom friends; while the feeling of the populace seemed to favor this treachery of his son. But in the midst of it all his faith triumphed, as faith, if it be the faith of God's elect, though it be tried as with fire, always will triumph.

We are now about to contemplate, perhaps, one of the most instructive pages in the remarkable history of this man of God. The subject seems to present itself in two points of view: THE PAINFUL REPROACH with which the enemies of David sought to afflict his soil: "Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God;" and THE POSTURE OF HIS SOUL BENEATH THAT REPROACH: "But you, O Lord, are my shield, my glory, and the lifter up of mine head."

It was A PAINFUL AND MALICIOUS REPROACH with which his friends thus taunted the tried and troubled soul of this man of God. In their view his case was forlorn and desperate. They saw his son plotting the downfall of his kingdom, and seeking to walk over the murdered body of his own father to the throne. They saw the huge billows of trouble rolling over the soul of the king of Israel and, to their short-sighted view, he had no avenue for escape. But, what was to David's heart a sword piercing yet deeper than all, was the declaration that God was his enemy; that even the heart of infinite love was closed against him, and the arm of infinite power too short to reach his case.

To assail his throne, to touch his person, were as nothing to David compared with limiting the love and restraining the power of his own covenant God. This was the bitterest element in the cup which now touched his lips; this the keenest thrust with which they pierced his heart: "There is no help for you in God."

Now, is the case of David a solitary one? Does he stand alone, beloved, in this remarkable feature of Christian experience? Ah no! it is but a type, more or less vivid, of the experience of every man of God; of all who are partakers of the Divine life, and who share in the sure mercies of David.

Where is the path trodden by a believer in Jesus that has never been trodden before? If, my reader, the footprint of no fellow traveler to glory is seen, there is yet a deeper and a broader footprint. It is not the footprint of the sheep, but of the Shepherd of the sheep. And it will be found recorded in Matthew 27:42-43. Christ was now hanging upon the cross, suffering in your stead; and His enemies thus taunted Him, "He saved others, Himself He cannot save. He trusted in God, let Him deliver Him."

Behold the footprint of Jesus! If we see not David, we can see David's Lord tracing the very path along which He leads His own chosen and beloved flock. There hung the Son of God in the weakness and desertion of His human nature- His enemies taunting Him- betrayed by one disciple, denied by another, forsaken by all. But far beyond this, the darkest cloud of all was the veiling of His Father's countenance, the hiding of His Father's smile; and now, in the depth of His soul's agony, they cast the taunt into His pale and quivering face. Oh, beloved, how deeply instructive to our soul is this part of our subject! Oh that, while we meditate, there may be the inward power of God the blessed Spirit, going with the truth, writing it upon our hearts! But turn we again to God's saints.

Under what circumstances are we sometimes exposed to this malicious taunt of our enemies? It is a common suggestion of Satan to poor sin burdened, Christ-seeking souls, that there is no salvation in Christ for them, though there may be for others. Doubtless, some who ponder this page can bear testimony to this truth, that such was just their case when they first set out in the Divine life. This was just their temptation and their stumbling block. "I know He saved others; I know He saved Saul of Tarsus; but will He save me? I know there is salvation in Christ for poor sinners; but will Jesus save me? My case seems so peculiar- is there salvation in Christ for such an one as I, who have stifled so many convictions, resisted so many warnings, and disregarded so many invitations?"

Where did these thoughts come from? Oh, they came from your greatest enemy, who seeks to retain you in his power, and to close up your path to the cross. Taking advantage, too, of the Divine chastisements, how often does Satan represent God as hostile to the believer! He corrects us, and we thank Him that He does, for there would be lacking one of the strongest evidences of your sonship were you exempt from the discipline of the family. Thus, next to the inward witness of the Spirit, we may place the parental discipline of our God. But Satan, taking advantage of the sorrow of the trial, suggests "See how He tries you! What! Is this like a God of infinite love and wisdom? Is this like a Father?" And how ready is unbelief to second these malicious reproaches and accusations of Satan! How prompt our unbelieving heart to suggest the inquiry, "Can God- will God help one now?" Ah, how often have we echoed Satan's cruel taunt, "There is no help for you, my soul, in God."

But we turn to the answer. And in doing so mark, in the outset, a most instructive fact in the experience of David under this smarting reproach. Oh, it is worthy of your profoundest study. What is the fact? He appeals to God. Where else could he flee? There was no help for him in man. The crystal cistern of created help was now flowing fast away, and was well-near dried. But he approaches God. With one breath he falsifies their accusation. They told him, "There was no help for him in God." His soul turns to that very God they denounce, and he exclaims, "You, O Lord, are my shield, my glory, and the lifter up of my head."

Saints of God! I have remarked that this part of his experience is worthy of your profoundest study. To see David at the very moment when his unbelief might have succumbed to the assertion of his enemies, moving towards, and appealing to that very Jehovah whom his friends were reviling- oh, it is a most instructive and consolatory spectacle!

Now, observe WHAT GOD REALLY IS TO HIS PEOPLE and oh may the Spirit lead us into this truth! Notwithstanding the malicious taunts of your enemies, what, my reader, is God really to His people? Just what He was to David: "You, O Lord; are my shield, my glory, and the lifter up of my head." Take that one piece of the Christian's armor- the shield: What a Divine protection is here! GOD is our shield. All the perfections of Jehovah encircle the child of God. The very heart of Jehovah encloses and encircles him. The arrow must first pierce the heart of God before it reaches the man of God.

And what a shield is the Lord Jesus! See how blessedly He revealed Himself to His trembling servant "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield." And who was this? It was Jesus- that same Jesus who appeared to the banished apostle in the Isle of Patmos, and said, "Fear not; I am He that lives and was dead, and am alive forevermore." Oh, what a shield is Jesus! He has shielded us from the curse of the law- from the vengeance of justice- from the power of sin- and from the very pit of hell.

What more? "You are my glory." What is the true glory of the believer? Not rank, nor distinction, nor wealth, nor influence, nor gifts. Oh no! The glory of the believer is that he has God for his Father, Christ for his Elder Brother, and stands in the righteousness of the Savior, and all his boast and glory is in the Lord Jesus. But not only this, but His people desire to live for His glory. It is the highest ambition of the child of God to walk so as to fear, and to live so as to honor Him. Is the Lord our glory? Are we living for Him? Is it our glory to lay ourselves out for Him? Then, "My soul shall make her boast in the Lord."

What more do the saints need? Is it deliverance? They have it- "The lifter up of my head." See how God lifted up David's. It hung with shame for Absalom. The man of valor, who had slain Goliath was now fleeing from his child, but God lifted him up. Oh, how low the head of the believer is laid at times, who can tell? Self-shame casts it down; the taunts of our enemies cast it down; sorrow, feeding like a canker-worm at the heart, casts it down; and that head seems as though it would never rise again! But God lifts it up, and bathes it in the sunshine of joy and gladness.

Dear reader, thank God for all these assaults of your enemies. They come not by chance, but are permitted by Him who loves you. Why are they permitted? To impel you within your refuge. Oh, then, take your every temptation, your every false suggestion, your every trial, and let it be an argument and a plea why you should go to God; and do not forget to meet all the accusations of your enemy with God's Word.

Do your enemies say, "There is no help for you in God? " God says there is help. Listen to the declarations of this: "Happy are you, O Israel: who is like unto you, O people saved by the Lord, the SHIELD of your HELP, and the sword of your excellency! And your enemies shall be found liars unto you." David proved them to be liars; Satan is a liar- unbelief is a liar- all are liars who say, "There is no help for you in God." You will not forget the sheet anchor of Luther: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present HELP in trouble." But you shall have the words of God himself: "Fear not; for I am with you, do not be dismayed; for I am your God I will strengthen you; yes, I will HELP

you; yes; I will uphold you with the right hand of my righteousness."

But suppose your enemy should say, "Yes, God is the help of His people when He brings them to trouble; but when they bring themselves into trouble by their own sin and folly, He leaves them" -meet them with God's own word: "O Israel, you have destroyed yourself; but in me is your HELP." Yes, there is help for you, poor believer, in Jesus. Come now to the Savior; take your burden to His Divine arm, your guilt to His precious blood, and see if there is not help in Christ for your poor, trembling, anxious soul. Oh, put your trust, saints of God, in your own covenant-God, for God will honor those who trust in Him, and will prove all your enemies to be liars; while He stands by and declares there is help for you in Himself, and so prove Himself to be a God of truth

Religious Progression

Religious Progression

"Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Php_3:13-14

"No, dear friends, I am still not all I should be, but I am focusing all my energies on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us up to heaven." Php_3:13-14

We have in these words a practical comment upon a truth which often engages the anxious study of the man of God- namely, the difficulty of salvation: "The righteous scarcely are saved." If any man might indolently have presumed upon the certainty of his salvation, it was Paul. So remarkable and miraculous were the attendant circumstances of his conversion, they could scarcely have left the shadow of a doubt upon his mind as to the reality of his salvation. Yet, conscious as he must have been that he had passed from death unto life, assured as he was that all who thus had passed from death unto life should enter glory, behold the noble spirit of this heavenly-minded man of God: "Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." In expounding these words, let us consider THE DIGNITY- THE GOAL- THE PRIZE of the man of God.

THE DIGNITY-

THE DIGNITY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER is beautifully placed before us in this one phrase, "the high calling of God." Under this denomination "the called of God," 'the whole family' are brought, sooner or later. In their Adamic nature they are "children of wrath, even as others." In Adam, they are dead, under the curse, exposed to eternal wrath; but sooner or later, by the mighty power of God the Spirit, are they brought out of that state, and are classified as a called people.

I might remark that, in a large and a very solemn sense, every man who hears the gospel is an outwardly called individual. From this truth there is no escape. No refining in theology, no plausible creed can demolish it. We should withhold from you the whole counsel of God, and be justly chargeable with blood-guiltiness, did we hold back the truth that every man and woman sitting under the sound of the gospel is, by that gospel, a called individual, and for the refusal or rejection of that call is accountable to God. We learn in Luke's Gospel, that the invitation to the great supper was sent out to all- the image of the glorious gospel which the Lord, in His holy mountain, had prepared for all people." "Many are called, but few are chosen."

Yes, my reader, nothing can release you from the solemn obligation, the awful responsibility of hearing the gospel. Your inability does not release you, your blindness of mind, your hardness of heart, do not excuse you no, if you are found rejecting this gospel, turning a deaf ear to the

charmer's voice, trampling upon the glorious invitations of a free-grace salvation, your present excuse will but augment your future woe; and from the throne of eternal justice, where you must give an account of all the sermons you have heard, the awful voice will speak, "I CALLED, and you refused; I stretched out any hand, and no man regarded; but you have set at nothing all my counsel, and would have none of any reproof. I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear comes." Oh, better never to have seen the light of day, or to have felt one throb of life, than to go down to everlasting punishment, having heard of Christ but to despise Him; having heard the gospel but to refuse its acceptance!

But in an especial sense the saints of God are a called people. To one or two passages, in which the Holy Spirit brings out this truth so strikingly, we must beg the reader's attention. "We know," (oh yes, not because others have testified of it, but because we have felt it ourselves,) "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the CALLED according to His purpose." Observe, "Whom He did predestinate, them He also CALLED." We dare not break that chain, we dare not sever these links.

That, too, is a striking passage in Jude, "Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, to those who are sanctified by God the Father; and preserved in Jesus Christ, and CALLED." The apostle Peter, that dear apostle, at whose feet we would oftener sit than at any other, because he could teach us what others could not, in consequence of his fall and recovery, thus exhorts the saints; "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your CALLING and election sure" make it evident. Again, "Among whom are you also the CALLED of Jesus Christ," "CALLED to be saints." What truth can be clearer than this, that the saints of God are a CALLED people.

It is the way God brings His banished ones to Himself. In the first Adam they are far off, "The promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even to as many as the Lord our God shall CALL." Oh, how far from God were some of us when that effectual and blessed call of the Spirit reached our ears! Yet, far off though we were, we heard that call, and by God's grace we obeyed it.

But look at the character of the believer's calling. Truly, it is a high calling. It is so because it is a divine and heavenly calling. It is not the calling of man, but the calling of God. It is not a calling to earthly dignity, it is a calling to a heavenly state- "the high calling of God," "called of God" -and the apostle thus addresses the saints: "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling." Who but GOD could call us? We heard the outward call of the ministry, and resisted it; we heard the external call of the gospel, and we closed our ears against it; we heard the call of Providence, and we hardened our hearts against its voice; but there came a divine and heavenly call- it came from God-It came from heaven- it reached our hearts, and it awoke the response, "Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears."

Whose voice but His can call the dead from the grave? Whose voice but His can call Ephraim away from his idols? Whose voice but His can call the worldling from his worldliness? Whose voice but His can call the covetous man from his covetousness? Whose voice but His can call the rebel to ground his weapons, and become reconciled to God? It was asked of old, "Who has heard the voice of God and lived?"

Oh yes; it is a heavenly calling- there is nothing of earth in it. It is heavenly in its origin, heavenly in its nature, heavenly in all its tendencies. The affections are heavenly, the desires are heavenly, the heart is heavenly; it came from heaven, and it lifts to heaven. To what a holy relation is the believer called! Is it no honor or dignity to be called a saint? What is a saint? Take the world's definition- a fanatic, an enthusiast, all that is contemptible and ignoble in intellect! But to be called a saint is to have a place among God's holy ones; it is to be a partaker of the divine nature, to be a transcript of God's holiness.

Oh, the high dignity of being a saint! of having implanted in the soul that germ of holiness that will expand until every thought of the mind, and every affection of the soul, shall be perfected in God's holiness! And what a high calling is our adoption to the relationship of children! To be called a child of God- taken into His family, and admitted to all the privileges of sons and of daughters, is the noblest relation to which the soul can be admitted.

The privileges belonging to this high calling stamp its greatness. Is it no high privilege to be in a state of agreement with God?- to have the smile of your Father ever beaming down upon you? What a privilege, too, is access to God! Does God condescend to call you His child, and Himself your Father, and yet banish you from all communion? Impossible! We may live inferior to our high calling, but God never loses sight of it. He has provided for our communion, and bids us draw near. Oh, is it no privilege to take all our cares and our sorrows to our Father? to pour out our needs to Him who loves us? Esteem it, my reader, the sweetest, holiest privilege of the man of God this side heaven.

THE GOAL-

Let us proceed to show that the Lord Jesus Christ is the "mark" or goal towards which the believer should be pressing. Observe the state after which this man of God aimed. He strove after a loftier, holier advancement in this high and heavenly calling. See his self-renunciation "I count not myself to have apprehended." How different from the estimation which all his brethren had of him! They thought him a giant, he knew himself to be a dwarf; they regarded him as the chief of the apostles, he knew himself to be "less than the least of all saints."

Learn to estimate lightly, in a sense, by the laudatory and kind opinion of man. Let it have no unholy or elevating effect upon your mind; but, when others commend you, go and lay your mouth in the dust before God. Oh, what an evidence of a man of God is this self-renunciation! No man can advance in this high calling who has not this for his starting-post. God raises us from the valley. He lifts us from the dust. God never confers any especial honor or grace upon His children but He first lays them low. If God is so dealing with you now, expect an especial blessing "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended." O Lord, give us this crucifixion of self!

Then observe the intensity of his soul, "This one thing I do." It was the only thing really important in his estimation- before it everything else gave way. "This one thing I do." And what was that one thing? It was advancement in his high calling- to become a holier saint, a closer imitator of Christ. All other things compared with this seemed less than nothing; and this one thing awoke the profoundest intensity of his ardent soul. Oh, were this with us the one thing, there would be less infliction of the rod, less chastening, less trial, less wounding and disappointment in the absence and failure of all others!

Observe, too, his oblivion of the past: "forgetting those things that are behind." What things? His sins? Oh no! these he never forgot. His days of unregeneracy, when he thirsted for the blood of the saints? No! this he ever remembered with the deepest self-abasement. The mercies of the Lord that strewed his path? No! not one faded from his memory. What, then, would he forget? His past spiritual attainments; these he would not rest in. He seemed to say, "I will forget my past attainments- attainments in knowledge and in grace; they shall not be the limit of my spiritual progression: I will press forward as one that has not apprehended, as he who had made no attainment whatever in the Divine life." This was the point after which his mighty soul panted.

How many Christians imagine that they have gone the length and breadth of the good land, because they have just tasted the milk and the honey, they imagine they have quaffed all the fulness God has provided? How much there is of which we, as yet, know but a little! How much we need a deeper knowledge of God- of the riches there are in Christ Jesus- of the giving up of some fond idol that has taken the place of Jesus! Forgetting the victories already won, and pressing on to still more brilliant achievements in the Christian warfare, to still profounder and loftier attainments in this high and heavenly calling, should be the one thing we do.

"I press toward the mark." The allusion is to him who, in the Grecian games, had his eye fixed upon the goal. His eye was not upon the prize, but upon the mark; the prize was beyond it, and so he pressed on in the race. What is the "mark" of the believer? What but the Lord Jesus Christ. Looking unto Jesus, he runs the race set before him. The original here is most expressive. The Greek conveys the idea of enlargement or scope. The Lord Jesus Christ is the scope where the believer ranges. He is the scope of both the Old and New Testament. Both point to Jesus. He is the substance and glory of both. He is the scope of the law, for He is its end; He is the scope of the gospel, for He is its substance; He is the scope of the Christian graces, for they all spring from union to Him; He is the scope of the promises, for they are all yes and amen in Him.

The apostle had his eye on Jesus. He looked to Jesus while he ran: "I press toward the mark- Jesus my mark- my scope. Let us "run the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus." How could we run without looking to Jesus, our mark? What real advance can we make looking to ourselves? But looking only to Christ, as bearing us on His heart before His Father in heaven, the most tried and the weakest child of God can press onward in the race, and attain to lofty degrees of perfection in this high and heavenly calling.

This looking to the "mark " also implies an ardent desire for a close resemblance to Christ. Who can study Christ and not be, in some measure, like Him? What perfects the student in his art? A close study of his model. So our looking to Christ will, perhaps imperceptibly to ourselves, assimilate us to His image, and others beholding us will take knowledge that we have been with Christ, and learned of Him.

The encouragement is great. The prize is beyond the mark. First Jesus- then the prize. No crown without the cross; no heaven without the atonement. If you are looking for the prize, and not to the mark of the prize, you will never reach it. There is no path to the incorruptible crown but by Jesus. Bearing His cross, and denying yourselves, you shall know what it is to wear the incorruptible crown, "which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give you at that day."

In conclusion, what a solemn question, agitating many hearts- "How may I know that I am called? It was an affliction that first brought me to think of my soul. God laid His hand upon the dear one of my heart; or, He touched my property; or, He touched my health. This was His voice." Well, be it so. Will you doubt your Divine calling because He called you in the storm and in the tempest? God has "other servants " whom He sends out when His gospel is resisted. He has touched you where you feel the keenest; laid you upon a bed of sickness, or "enclosed you within the house of mourning, and there you have heard His voice."

But I am still afraid I am not one of God's called ones? " Is Jesus precious to your heart? Do you mourn for sin? Ah, my reader, those tears are godly tears. The Spirit has broken up that fountain of feeling, and you weep. Is it your desire and aim to be a more holy child of God- to be a more Christ-like follower of the Lamb? Oh, then, you are one of the called ones. That which is in you came from heaven, and to heaven it ascends; it came from God, and to God it leads. It marks you to be a new creature in Christ Jesus.

But, I would say, rest not in the region of doubt and uncertainty; seek advancement in the Divine life. Do not limit yourself; forget past attainments, and press onward, fixing your eye upon Christ, your Mark, your Leader, your Pattern, your Scope; and then the glorious prize shall be yours. Walk worthy of the high vocation where with you are called, you saints of God! Lay aside whatever is contrary to its heavenliness. "Walk worthy, of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God," and soon the prize will be yours!

Methinks I see it prepared to encircle the brow of some who have almost reached it. Methinks I see the gemmed crown glistening before the eye of those who are ready to exclaim, "The time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day." Yes, the prize awaits you, saint of God! And you who overcome shall sit down with the Savior on His throne, wearing that starry diadem, even as He overcame, and is sat down upon His throne.

Good and Evil Alike From God

Good and Evil Alike From God

"Shall we receive good at the hands of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil?" - Job 2:10

Many religious speculatists have endeavored to represent Job as a fictitious character. But those who know anything spiritually of the truth of God in their hearts, well know that his experience so singularly corresponds with their own, that, if they accept his as mere fiction, they must denounce their own as such. If we believe the profound, spiritual, and instructive truths that compose his remarkable history to be mere figments of the imagination, illustrative of anything else than the path along which God leads all His saints in the wilderness to glory, then we must believe that all we have experienced, assimilating with his story, to be the mere hallucinations of a wild imagination. No, my reader, Job was a man of God- a man after God's own heart; and all the dealings of God with him were designed to teach the Church of God some of its most spiritual and blessed lessons to the remotest age of the world.

From his peculiar history we have selected but a very small portion, yet containing a truth such as could only be gleaned from a direct revelation from God Himself. May the Spirit of truth give us, if but in the merest outline, a heartfelt experience of its holy instruction and comfort.

This striking declaration of Job involves a great truth, that, in the experience of the man of God, both good and evil flow from the same Divine Source; and that if we receive at God's hand good, shall we not cheerfully accept, as from the same hand, those trying, afflictive dispensations which are not the less tokens of His love, and work out the good which their somber character conceals?

"Shall we receive good at the hands of the Lord, and shall we receive evil?" The words begin, where every child of God ought, when he takes up his pen to record the darkest periods of his history- with THE GOODNESS OF GOD. Some have scales only for trials; some dip their pencil only in dark colors. They are eloquent and fluent while describing God's trying dispensations; but ask them about their mercies, the bright lights in their picture, the verdant, flowery carpeting of their landscape- and, alas! they are dumb.

In speaking of the goodness of God, we can find no parallel. It is so peculiar, so like itself, we are at a loss for comparison; all imagery, symbol, and type seem to vanish the moment we attempt to unfold the Divine goodness. We sometimes compare it to a fountain- that fountain may dry, but the fountain of God's goodness never dries. We contrast it with the sun- that sun has no light of its own, it draws every beam from God Himself, the Fountain of light- but the goodness of God is essential and eternal. Oh, how does all imagery fade into utter insignificance when we attempt to unfold what God is! Yet, we may speak of that- and what is sweeter than all, we may experience that- to which we can find no comparison, the goodness of God.

The world is the recipient of God's goodness. Oh, it is an affecting thought, a solemn truth- this ungodly world is at this moment sunning itself in the beams of God's goodness, yet throwing back

in His face nothing but blasphemy, infidelity, and sin. Does this truth find an application to your heart, my reader? Does it, like a mirror, reflect your moral image? Are you like that rock, warmed with beams and moist with dew, yet yielding no fruit? Are you like the sand that belts the ocean, washed with its waves, yet exhibiting no verdure? -and still the sun concentrates its beams upon that rock, and still the sand is washed by the ocean; and notwithstanding all the base returns you make, God's goodness fills your cup, guards your person, provides for your needs, while He receives nothing in return but ingratitude, indifference, and sin; no, a practical denial of God Himself.

But it is especially of the believer we are now to speak, as receiving good at the hand of God. What a declaration is this! O beloved, who can unfold to you what is contained in these words, "We receive good at the hand of God?" Shall we attempt to assist you in considering this truth? In giving Himself to be the covenant God of His people, God gives them an infinite ocean of goodness. Faith lays her hand upon God, and says, "This God is my God;" and looking prospectively to the bright termination of life, faith adds, "and He will be my Guide, even unto death." Oh, how little do the best of us know what we possess in possessing GOD! Oh, has not the thought expanded your heart while treading your weary way, "This God is my God what can I desire more?"

Yes; and do not forget that God first gives His people the best and greatest. Why? To teach us that if He has given us Himself the greater, what else is there that He will withhold? This is an encouraging thought to the depressed spirit. If our faith can lay hold upon this truth- God Himself is mine, then faith argues, "What else is there that He will not give me?" Do you know this from experience? Does your heart glow with it? Is it the great lever that lifts you above your trials, above your needs? "God is my soul's portion, both now and forever. I enjoy Him now, and I know that my present enjoyment is the certain prelude of my being forever with Him." Dear reader, this one truth is the substance of all blessing -God in Christ is our God. "We receive good at the hand of God," so that, be our necessities what they may, the resources of God are adequate to them all.

In having received Jesus, what good have we received! Jesus is a received good. Deem not this an unimportant truth. It lies at the very root of all your happiness. If salvation is not of grace, then it is not ours. If Jesus is a gift, I receive Him as such. I receive Him as a good at the hands of God. And oh, what a good do I receive in receiving Jesus!- in whom it has pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell- Jesus, my Redeemer, who has ransomed my soul, in whom the Father has deposited all good! What possible good can there be that I have not in Christ?

Our great sin, at least one of them, is in limiting Jesus, limiting His power, limiting His love, and limiting His graces. If I look at my sorrow and say it is too deep for Christ's sympathy, I limit Him. If I look at my giant corruptions and say, they are too great for the grace of Jesus to subdue, I limit Him. If I think my difficulty in life too insurmountable for the power of Christ, then I limit Him. But if, in simple faith, I see that, in receiving Jesus as a gift, I receive all good in Him, then am I enabled to rise superior to all my circumstances, traveling to one whom God has made Head over all things to His Church. You that know His preciousness to your hearts, testify that you have found all good in Christ; testify what peace you have experienced in the sprinkling of His blood upon your conscience, and what assured hope, springing from a sense of completeness through His righteousness.

And what a good is bestowed upon us in the gift and indwelling of the Holy Spirit! "The Holy Spirit, who He has given unto us." To know that He has made our hearts His home, our bodies His temple, dwelling there amid a thousand daily slights and woundings, yet never weary, never impatient, never withdrawn- still teaching, still comforting, still sanctifying, still witnessing. Oh, what arithmetician can compute the good which we have received at God's hand? Beloved, taste and see that the Lord is good, good to us temporally, good spiritually, good eternally!

But we are to trace THE EVIL we receive to the same Source as the good: "Shall we not receive evil?" Job was receiving evil at that moment. The evil alluded to here must be interpreted not of moral evil- because God cannot be the author of sin. But it is that evil referred to Amos 3:6 : "Shall there be evil in the city, and the Lord has not done it?"- that natural evil of which we are perpetually the subjects.

Unmingled good is not the portion even of the saints of God. We have no doubt as to which weighs down the scale, for good infinitely transcends the evil; but it is mingled. Unmingled good is reserved for heaven. There, all is pure unmixed bliss, deepening as the ocean flows on through eternity. But here the good and the evil in our history are wisely and happily combined: "Shall we receive good at the hands of God, and shall we not receive evil?" The origin and the source of all the disciplinary dealings of the believer are unfolded. They are not as from accident, but are from God.

Here is a truth which ought at once to raise us above all the trying circumstances of our history. What! does the wormwood flow from the same hand that gives me the honey? What! did that dark cloud, which hung over my soul, issue from the Fountain that gives me light? Did the stroke that smote me so severely come from the heart that gave me Jesus? Yes, the good and the evil alike flow from the same Divine and precious Source, even your covenant-God. Oh, it is a blessed truth to see all flowing from God. The same hand that wounds me, binding up my wound; the same hand that casts me down, lifting me up; the same covenant-God that enshrouds Himself in some dark design, tells me He is mine at the same moment.

But the question seems to place itself in this form, "Shall we not expect evil?" I do not mean that we are to be always living in gloomy anticipation of trial. Many of God's saints live in that unhappy, and, I would add, unholy mood- always anticipating evil. Yet there is a sense in which we should expect it. Should it take us by surprise? We may be so absorbed in God's goodness as not to expect there will be the counterbalancing of evil. Shall we not be unprepared for it when it comes? Shall we only have a cup for the good, and not for the evil?

Shall we doubt the wisdom of God, shall we impeach the truth of God, shall we suspect the love of God when the evil comes? Shall we think that every perfection of God is embodied in the good, and the evil is to set forth and unfold no part of God's character and administrative government? Shall our faith lose its hold upon God as the Fountain of goodness, the moment He sees fit to remove the good and send the evil? God forbid!

See what it is that makes even the evil God sends to be good- because He sends it. And when does it really become good to us? It is when God so sanctifies it that it works good in us. When God employs it to correct and remove our sins, oh, what good have we then found it! When it makes us more like God in His holiness; when it creates a void which God Himself fills; when the

spirit of prayer is roused, and Jesus, the sympathizing Brother, becomes more precious to our souls, oh, what good is then educed from our evil! And for this negative good we praise Him.

Let us learn from this subject to welcome all our Father's varied dealings, be they couched in good or evil. All are good. The curse removed, and sin cancelled by Jesus, there is no real evil even in the most afflictive dispensation of our God. Accept, then, your sorrow, receive your trial, welcome your affliction as a good- enveloped, hidden, and invisible now; but afterwards to shine forth as the sun, when the storm-cloud that draped it melts into light and beauty. "Not my will, O my Father, but yours be done."

Before long, our good will be unmixed and unmingled. No sin will embitter our happiness, no sorrow will becloud our joy. Our "sun shall no more go down, neither shall the moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be an everlasting light, and the days of our mourning shall be ended.

Spiritual Sight

Spiritual Sight

"What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him. The blind man said, "Lord, I want to see." "Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road. Mark 10:51-52

Spiritual blindness, as a consequence of the fall, has smitten the entire human race. Not that they are conscious of it. A spiritually blind man does not know his blindness. He imagines he sees- declares that he sees, and denounces you as ignorant if you affirm the contrary. And yet he is blind. "And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into the world, that they who see not might see, and that they who see [who imagine they see] might be made blind"- be blinded to their own righteousness. And when this spiritual sight is restored, then comes the knowledge of former blindness: "This one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." A consciousness of former blindness is an evidence of present sight. Here is one of the unmistakable marks of a "man of God"- he is one who sees.

Let us first contemplate CHRIST'S COMPASSIONATE INQUIRY, "What do you want Me to do for you?" That our Lord was perfectly acquainted with the case of this poor man none can doubt. He did not, therefore, propose the inquiry from any ignorance on His part. Is there not something in this fact deeply instructive and encouraging- that the case of the petitioner was minutely, perfectly known to the Son of God? Have you a need, my Christian reader, that Jesus does not know? Have you a trial that has not first tried His heart? Are you battling with a corruption of which He is not sensible? Methinks there is something in this individual and perfect knowledge of our case that is vastly encouraging. I draw near to Christ with the thought, "He knows what is in man, for He created him, and He is acquainted with all the circumstances of my individual case." Sweet thought! Place the crown on His Godhead, for were He not absolutely God you would know nothing of the sweetness of this truth.

But the question arises, Why this inquiry? One or two answers will suffice. Although Christ knows all His creature's needs, He often appears not to know them until made known to Him in prayer. So costly and precious is prayer in His sight! He is often mute until His people speak. True prayer is the breathing of the Divine life in the soul of man. It is but of little moment what the wording is; it may be simple, hesitating, and ungrammatical to a human ear- yet it is the voice of God's blessed Spirit, and is eloquent with Him, and prevails. I would be far from undervaluing a stated ritual where infirmity pleads for it, but in all prayer let us see that we do not straiten the Spirit: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

Beloved, the Lord will hear His people's cry, be the mode of its presentation what it may. Believing prayer is all powerful with God. Prayer is the utterance of poverty- the cry of need. See what it was wrung the cry from David's lips, "The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell got hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow. Then I called upon the Lord; O Lord, I beseech you,

deliver no soul." The Lord laid the pressure upon David, trouble and sorrow, and then he cried. Blessed trouble, hallowed sorrow, that stirs us up to take hold upon God! Little, often, do we envision what intent the Lord permits a need or sends a trial. "Let me hear your voice, for sweet is your voice," is the message from God of your trouble.

The case of Jonah is another instance worthy of your devout consideration: "I cried, by reason of my affliction, unto the Lord, and he heard me." My reader, if you will honestly examine your walk with God, I think you will discover this marked feature, that, until God has placed upon you some pressure, has touched you where you feel the keenest, your voice has been too much as a strange voice to God.

Another reason for Christ's inquiry: He would call especial notice to the compassion and power He was about to display in the case of the petitioner. It is thus the Lord awakens expectation. His work shall not be done in a corner, that all men may behold His wonders, and glorify God. Going to God on the basis of the atonement, the blood in the hand of faith, every chamber of God's heart will open, and all the treasures of His wisdom and grace will be at our command. But, before He unlocks the treasury, He will bring us into David's experience, "My expectation is from Him." He will cause us to make known our need, that in Him might be our expectation.

You will mark, too, the speciality of His request. It was not a general one. We too much deal with generalities in prayer. We often lose a particular request in a multitude of general ones. We generalize too much in prayer, asking many blessings, and yet not feeling the deep conviction of the need of any one in particulars. But learn instruction from this petitioner. The Creator of all worlds was before him; a blank card, as it were, was placed in his hand- "What do you want me to do for you?" He might have filled that card with innumerable petitions; but no! he felt the need of one, and that one swallowed up all others.

What if the Lord had offered him wealth, rank, estate? he would have exclaimed: "Lord, this is not what I need, and what I crave at Your hand; it is, that I might receive my sight. I am blind, open my eyes that I may see." My dear reader, what is it that we all need, but spiritual sight? When the Holy Spirit convinces a sinner of sin, he needs Jesus. What will you place before a poor inquirer asking for salvation but Jesus? His plaintive, earnest cry is, "I want Jesus- I want to see my interest in Christ- my adoption in the family of God. I want to see God in Christ as my reconciled God and Father." This experience and this cry tests the reality of a man's spiritual conviction. When the Holy Spirit creates in the soul a desire for salvation, the cry is, "Give me Christ, or I die!"

And what is the desire of the more advanced believer? Is it not that he might see more of Jesus, more of the hatefulness of sin? He desires to see more glory in Christ's person, more tenderness in His heart, more efficacy in His blood. His prayer is, "Open my eyes, let the scales fall from them; anoint them with fresh eye-salve, that I may see more clearly God, and Christ, and truth."

Now mark **THE PERFECT CURE**. In the first place, Jesus recognizes and crowns his faith. What spiritual mind is not struck with the marvellous power of this poor man's faith? Observe how emphatically he acknowledges Christ's divine Messiahship: "Jesus Son of David," "Lord," "Jehovah." The multitude contemptuously styled Him, "Jesus of Nazareth;" but this man, enlightened by a ray from the throne of God, his spiritual eye already opened, he places the diadem upon His deity, and crowns Him "Lord of all."

You will then mark the working of His faith. He doubted not the willingness of Christ. What does the Lord Jesus require on the part of the petitioner? Is it gift? is it sacrifice? is it penance? Oh no! All He asks is, "do you believe that I am able to do this? Do you believe that I am willing to grant this? Only, believe either in my power or my love." My reader, what is your request? Come, nothing doubting; let but your faith, though with trembling hand, crown Christ's willingness and power, and you shall have to the uttermost all that you need and all that you ask.

The grant was instantaneous: "Immediately he received his sight." Why should there be delay? Why postpone the cure? He had touched the spring of Christ's heart, and he was instantly cured. Oh, happy Bartimeus! What a Being of power and of glory bursts upon your gaze! On whom but the compassionate Savior does your new-born vision rest? So is it when the Eternal Spirit opens the eye of the soul to see spiritual things- the first object the believing sinner sees is Jesus! The scale falls, the veil is uplifted, and JESUS stands before the enraptured soul- the loveliest, the dearest Being in the universe! My reader, have you so seen Jesus? Has Christ been revealed to you?

Then mark the grateful acknowledgment. Jesus said unto him, "Go your way: I have granted you your request, I have poured the light of day upon your eye, and you see." "No," exclaims the grateful man, "not my way, Lord, but Yours. Love and gratitude constrain me to follow You wherever You go. You are my all to You would I cling. Let me go where You go, let me dwell where You dwell, and let me be with You, and that forever." See how powerful is the drawing of Divine love! Having received his petition, does he return to find the garment he had cast away? No, he seems to say, "I have found a better garment, the righteousness that completely justifies me: I do not need the robe that impeded my coming to the Savior- it was the emblem of my poverty and blindness, I have obtained one the emblem of my new-born state, and henceforth I will walk with Jesus in white, for He has clothed me with the garment of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness."

My reader, are you so following Jesus in the way- His way? Have you cast from you the filthy garments, and are you clothed with change of clothing? Place no confidence in your baptism, in keeping your religious days, in your sacraments. See, oh see, that you have the root of the matter in you. It is a narrow way, though a way of holy liberty; and as sure as you are found walking this narrow way, just as sure will it conduct you to everlasting glory, where you shall exchange the humiliation and burden of the cross, for the deathless splendor of the crown.

May the Holy Spirit bless this His own truth! May He bring you to see how empty the world is, how sinful your heart is, how worthless your own righteousness is! And seeing Jesus to be "made of God unto you wisdom; righteousness, sanctification, and redemption," may you henceforth follow Him in the way, until you arrive where He is- in heaven's eternal glory!

Readiness for the Lord's Coming

Readiness for the Lord's Coming

And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.— Matthew 25:8.

The fall of man has not utterly annihilated all that was originally lovely in our nature. Among the instincts of our humanity which still exert a powerful influence within us is the abhorrence which we feel of what is false and fraudulent. A forged cheque, a counterfeit will, a false deed, awakens in our minds a feeling of abhorrence; an instinct of honor and integrity rises up in opposition to the fraud. But there is something yet more appalling in the thought of a man obtaining his religion by fraud—stealing his religion—coming into the possession of what he terms a religion, not properly, nor justly, nor truly. Now there is this remarkable feature in the Word of God, that while all its delineations and descriptions carry us back to remote ages, yet they vividly and indelibly depict characters that exist at the present moment. They present our nature possessing the same features, the same principles, which it ever did. Here we have a description of a certain class of individuals that were possessors of religion; but when the grand moment arrived which tested its reality, it was found that they possessed none—and that, following the instincts of their fallen humanity, they thought of borrowing their hope, their plea for entrance into heaven, from others. Now it is the solemn conviction of our minds that this constitutes a large class in the present day; that there are numbers who have professed Christ, but who have taken their religion on hearsay; who have it, so to speak, second hand; who have not themselves passed from death unto life; have not become regenerated by the Spirit; have not become personally acquainted with the Lord Jesus; and who have not, in the lamp of their religious profession, one particle of that sacred oil, that divine grace; which will be found to burn, and to burn brightly, and to burn forever, when the summons shall come to call them hence. Our prayer, dearly beloved, is, that the truth of God which we are about to illustrate to you may be heart searching; that we may unfold it with all earnestness and fidelity; that you may be led to ascertain whether your religion is a heartfelt and experimental religion; whether your hope is a scriptural and well founded hope; or whether you are not now in the state of the virgins who said, “Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out.” I wish to direct your attention to— CHRIST’S SOLEMN SURPRISE—MAN’S BORROWED LIGHT—and, THE SOUL’S ETERNAL DARKNESS.

CHRIST’S SOLEMN SURPRISE

The text evidently refers to a surprise on the part of Jesus Christ; and we wish to illustrate this striking fact, by reference to two or three stages of the Christian’s experience. There are many cases in the believer’s history when Christ, as it were, takes him by surprise. Take, for example, conversion. Real conversion is a surprise of Christ. Who among us—probably there are but few, if any, who reverting to their conversion, can say that it was preceded by any very striking indication that the Lord Jesus was about to bring them to Himself. In the majority of cases, conversion is a work of surprise; it is preceded by nothing that indicates the approach of such a moral revolution of the soul. In most instances it is rapid, as was the case of Saul of Tarsus on his way to Damascus.

Christ surprised him on his way. Was it not so with you, my reader? Did not Jesus surprise you, when first your heart was touched? when first your conscience was roused, when first your spirit was humbled? when first your will was bent to the will of God? Was not that a gracious surprise, when Jesus drew near, dried your tears, and bound up your broken heart? O yes, we must testify that that was a gracious surprise, when Jesus, in the sovereignty of His grace, approached and spoke peace to our hearts, light to our minds, enkindled joy and gladness within. There are gracious surprises of Christ in the experience of the believer in subsequent stages of his history, when Christ draws near, and manifests Himself to his soul. And I trust, beloved, that you are not a stranger to these. Oh, let not your religion be a religion unmarked by the gracious manifestations of Christ! What a gracious surprise was it when Christ joined the two disciples on their journey to Emmaus! Their hearts were filled with grief and gloom; they were ruminating on scenes which had just been transacted at Jerusalem; and as in sadness they were wending their way, Jesus drew near, and walked and talked with them. They found His company so pleasant, so sweet, that when they reached their homes they constrained Him that He should abide with them. Ah, how often, believer, when sad and lonely, Jesus has drawn near and spoken to you! What a gracious surprise of the Lord Jesus was it when Mary met Him at the tomb! While looking for her absent Lord, her heart bursting with grief, Jesus drew near, and manifested Himself. We might illustrate this blessed truth by many such examples, all concurring to show that the child of God is privileged to look for these blessed manifestations, these gracious surprisals. Let none for a moment suppose that there might not be that same close communion between Christ and our hearts now that there was of old. Then there comes a solemn time when the man of God experiences surprise in death—that solemn moment when the Lord Jesus sends for His dear servant, and bids him come home. I suppose that, let Death come when he may, he takes us by surprise. There may be previous premonition, there may be the slow decay, the gradual taking down of the earthly tabernacle—the pain, the fever, the convulsion, all indicating that life is ebbing—yet when death comes to a man, with a slow, stealthy footstep, unseen, unheard, it surprises him. Oh, see that he does not surprise you in your sins, in your rebellion against God! Better never to have been born than to have been surprised by death in enmity against Jehovah. But death to the believer is the surprise of Christ. It is Christ that comes for him—death's victim, and yet death's conqueror. Oh, what a gracious surprise of Christ, then, will that be, when your Savior stands by your dying bed, speaks words of comfort to your heart, lights up hope in your soul, strengthens you by His grace, and assures you that in treading that lonely valley, He is by your side. Believer, are you fettered by the thoughts of death? Learn to look at it as the blessed moment when Christ will come down to His garden, pluck the fair flower, and, placing it in His bosom, bear it to His paradise on high. Then comes the great and solemn event, the closing drama in the world's history. The Lord Jesus Christ is to come again—the Bridegroom is to appear, and publicly espouse His beloved Church. It is written that Jesus Christ shall presently cleave the heavens and appear again, surrounded by all those who sleep in Him. I speak not of this event with a view of unfolding the details of that day. With regard to the mode of Christ's coming, there may be diversity of opinion; but that Christ will come publicly to espouse His beloved Church is a fact which, I suppose, those who differ as to the mode of His appearing are all united in. And what a glorious, what a sublime, what an awesome fact is this! Christ is to appear personally; the very Person that was impaled on Calvary's cross will be seen cleaving the clouds of heaven. "Every eye shall see Him." The eyes that are now fixed upon this page will look on the face of the coming Savior—the coming Judge. Every individual

shall stand around the great white throne, in the center of which sits the Lamb of God. What a sublime fact is that! Do you make the subject of the coming of the Lord one of meditation, and prayer, and hope? Or, are you found dismissing it from your mind—perchance from your creed? To us who have gone to the burial place, and laid our departed ones there, in hope that they slept with Jesus, that their disembodied spirits were nestling in the bosom of the Lamb, how precious is this truth! You who weep, and weep in hope that the coming of Christ will restore them to you again, you shall behold them in glory, shall rush into their warm embrace, and gaze once more on the loved ones from whom you parted on Jordan's bank. Oh, treasure in your believing heart this blessed hope, and when next you go and shed the tears of sacred memory over the turf that covers them, blend with your grief the fond thought, that Jesus will come again in person; and that those who sleep in Him, He will bring with Him. Comfort your bereaved hearts with these words.

MAN'S BORROWED LIGHT

And, then, when the Lord Jesus Christ shall thus appear, we are told that the human race will be divided into two classes—represented by the five wise and the five foolish virgins. Let us for a few moments look at one of these classes. We are all agreed as to the “wise virgins.” They are the true sons of God; they are sincere believers in Christ; they are those who have been wise unto salvation; who have been truly born again of the Spirit; who have seen the worthlessness of their own righteousness, and have accepted the righteousness of Christ. In a word, they are those who have not only confessed Christ, and loved Christ in the world, but they have received into their hearts the grace of God, which has renewed them, sanctified, and kept them to the end. These are the “wise.” They are the “foolish” who had in their hands the lamp of the Christian professor, without the golden oil of Divine grace; who, when the hour came that brought their hope to the test, found themselves deficient: “And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.” A religious professor may have much apparent spiritual life and intelligence—he may be well acquainted with the Bible—he may be well up in the evidences of Christianity—his intellect may be illumined—his judgment informed with regard to truth, and yet may be found to have—borrowed his religion from another. He has derived it from the reading of religious books, or from the fellowship of Christians: He has a taste for religious literature, and his mind is interested and elevated, and yet an hour may come which shall prove that that man borrowed his spiritual light and knowledge—derived it, not from the direct teaching and enlightening of the Word and Spirit of God, but from another's lamp! He can master the most subtle points of truth, he can explain difficulties, harmonize discrepancies, silence skepticism—and yet he does not know this truth experimentally, “I am a lost sinner, and Christ is a gracious and loving Savior.” He has received his spiritual knowledge from others, and not from the experimental teaching of God the Holy Spirit. Beware that you have not your religion from books, from sermons, from fellowship with others. Search yourself, and see whether the Divine Spirit has instructed you—whether Christ has been formed in your heart—the hope of glory. “And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil”—give us of your experimental communion with the Savior—“for our lamps are gone out.” The light which is only in the intellect, the truth which only informs the judgment, is like the expiring lamp that fails when its bright shining luster is most needed in the dark valley of the shadow of death. Oh, how many a man can speak of Christian experience fluently—can quote the language of pious Christians—seems to have traveled the various stages of the believer's life—takes his place at the Table of the Lord; but when the hour of trial comes, it will be found that that man has

transferred to himself the Christian experience of others, and has been building himself up with the spurious hope that he was experimentally acquainted with Christ; whereas the awful discovery bursts upon him—that he never experienced in his own heart those spiritual exercises of which he could so glibly speak. Oh, it is an appalling thought, my reader, how far a man may go in acquaintance with Christian experience, and yet be destitute of one particle of vital religion! Now we reach a very solemn conclusion—“Our lamps are gone out,” or, as the marginal reading is, “our lamps are going out.” Just at the moment, the solemn crisis of Jesus’ coming, they found their lamp began to wane, and its light to expire. The light of intelligence, the light of sacraments, the light of a religious profession; began to grow dim, until the last spark went out. “Our lamps are going out.” This often transpires before death. In the day of dark adversity, the day which tries a man, brings him into trouble, touches him, perhaps; in his health, perhaps in his property, or yet more deeply touches him in the feelings of his nature—takes from him a lovely child, a beloved wife, a dear parent, and the man, thus smarting under the rod of God, disputes His right to take away his health or property—to come into his garden and pluck that blooming flower, and break that beautiful stem; his heart rises in rebellion; and in the dark hour of adversity his lamp fails and goes out, and the man finds that his religion was not a religion for the stern, solemn hour of affliction. Many a man’s lamp, too, goes out in the hour of temptation. It did well for him when no temptations beset him; but when they present themselves, he finds his religious principles and hope to fail. The past few years have presented many examples of men who stood high in religious profession, but who have come into contact with erroneous doctrine, false worship, and the temptations to fraud, and the lamp which burned so brightly has been extinguished; proving that their light was not derived from real conversion, from a heartfelt experience of the truth as it is in Jesus. But if a man’s hope proves itself spurious, a borrowed thing only, it will most assuredly prove so when life is fast ebbing, and death comes in its wake. A deathbed is a great and solemn test of our religious profession and hope. We are fast speeding to that point. In a little while it will not be what the Church thinks of you; or what the world thinks of you. The great question will be, “Am I in Christ?” In that hour—that precious hour to the child of God—how delightful to have the reality, and not a mere profession; then the light that burned, perhaps, so dimly and obscurely in your religious life, so faintly indeed that few were attracted by its beauty, then will that light blaze up and brighten with increased luster; and the grace that renewed you, the grace that kept you, the grace that followed you to the last stage of life will then be your happy experience in strengthening and supporting you, when heart and flesh are failing.

Learn from this subject that if there are multitudes that have borrowed their religion, this but proves the genuineness of the religion of others. There are those, and multitudes too, who, thanks be to God, possess the reality, therefore let not the skeptic, let not the libeler fling in the face of God’s saints the cruel taunt of the irregularities that mark the life of some professors. Remember that if there are some who walk in the light of others, this but proves that others have the real light; so that you gain nothing by holding up the religious inconsistencies of those who profess the Savior. We derive from this subject a most important and instructive inference, that there is no such thing in the Christian Church as works of supererogation. It is the doctrine of a false Church, the Church of Rome, that a man may have grace enough for himself and a little to spare for another. Our subject teaches that the Church of God is scarcely saved, is just saved, and that no believer has any measure of grace over and above what he needs for himself, in order to impart it to others, be they ever so dear. In conclusion, see that your light is not borrowed; let it not be a reflected but a

solar light; not taken from hearsay, but a light beaming down from Jesus, streaming from His cross. And let it be a serious matter with you, not how you are judged by human opinion, but that you are walking with Jesus, and that your light is burning brighter and brighter.

THE SOUL'S ETERNAL DARKNESS

One word more. Jesus waits to pour this precious oil of saving grace abundantly into your heart. He welcomes all. Come, then, you who feel your need; approach in your emptiness and poverty, there is grace enough in Christ for you, fulness of renewing grace, fulness of sanctifying grace, fulness of preserving grace, and of that grace that will keep your hearts loyal to Jesus, and bring you at last to glory. Believer in Jesus! keep well trimmed, brightly burning, and uplifted high, the lamp of a true, holy, undimmed profession of Christ. He, whose appearing you love, will anoint you with fresh oil day by day. We have need of watchfulness, lest the supplies slack and the light grow dim. Our Lord has set you upon this holy work of watchfulness: "What I say unto you, I say unto all, WATCH." Watch against the world, it is seductive; watch against the creature, it is ensnaring; watch against Satan, he is subtle; watch even against lawful things, they may be unnecessary; watch against your own heart; for it is more sinful, treacherous, and dangerous than all. Look for the first signal and sign of His approach, who has said, "Behold, I come quickly!" O precious thought! O blessed hope! The certain, speedy coming of our Lord. He comes to end our sorrows, to annihilate the last remains of sin, to reunite us with the saints in glory, and to have us with Himself forever. "He that has this hope in him purifies himself, even as He is pure." Walk only in the light of Jesus. Live not upon the grace, or faith, or strength of another. Let your grace, or your faith, or your love be ever so small, yet, if it be but real, if it be but true, it will land you in glory. It may be but as the "smoking flax," yet there is the divine spark there, and it shall never be extinguished; while the graceless lamp of Christian profession, which blazed before men, will expire in eternal darkness when the Lord comes. Oh to be a real, humble follower of Christ! Lord, let our love be divine, our grace real, our profession true, our hope a good hope, a living hope, shining more and more unto the perfect day!

The Man of God Divinely Prospered

The Man of God Divinely Prospered

"The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was under Joseph's care; because the Lord was with Joseph, and whatever he did, the Lord made it to prosper." Genesis 39:23

If ever God was in human history, it was that of Joseph. Perhaps in no inspired record of the saints does there appear so little of man; and so much of God, as in his whole career, from its obscure and lowly commencement to its exalted and honorable close, was a continuous comment upon the words which introduce this chapter of our work, "Lord was with him, and whatever he did, the Lord made it to prosper." Let us meditate briefly upon these two particulars- THE LORD'S PRESENCE WITH THIS MAN OF GOD, and ITS CONSEQUENT INFLUENCE UPON HIS DESTINY.

THE LORD'S PRESENCE WITH JOSEPH-

A more privileged state it is impossible to conceive- the Lord with His people. Less than the reality and the consciousness of this will not suffice the true man of God. It was, doubtless, the assurance of this that bore up the patriarch throughout his chequered and eventful history. And here we may observe, in passing, that no reflective, ingenuous mind can trace his history, and rise from its study with the conviction that that history is a cunningly-devised fable- the whole a fiction and a myth.

"The Lord was with Joseph," and this was the secret of his marvellous life. The Lord was with him, protecting his life when that life had been virtually sacrificed by his brethren; the Lord was with him when sold as a slave to the Egyptian merchants; the Lord was with him, preserving him amid temptation in Potiphar's house; the Lord was with him, cheering the loneliness of his prison; the Lord was with him as the interpreter of Pharaoh's vision; the Lord was with him in each step of his subsequent career- his sun and his shield, and his exceeding great reward.

Beloved, is the Lord really less with His people now? Oh no! Look at this truth for a moment in a few particulars. The Lord is with His saints, ordaining and shaping their every step. The man of God advances in no uncertain, unprepared path in life. His whole career, from his cradle to his grave, is a divinely-constructed map, prepared in the eternal mind, purpose, and counsel of Jehovah. Nothing is left to contingency. There is no crook in his lot, no divergence in his path, no event that bends, or shades, or burdens it- but the Lord is in it- ordering, arranging, and controlling all. It is, in truth, not his way, but the Lord's way by which he is led. "Show me now YOUR way," is the prayer of the man of God.

The Lord is with His people in temptation. Were we exempt from this part of our heavenly discipline, we should be exempt from one of the most touching illustrations of the Divine presence, power, and love. In nothing do we more exhibit our powerlessness than in this. The mightiest saints have succumbed before the weakest foe when left by God to learn, by sad experience, their self-impotence. Nothing but the power of God can keep a man of God after he has been made a new creature in Christ Jesus. "Kept by the power of God," is written, as upon the forehead, of

every upheld, holy, consistent man of God. The Lord is with us in temptation, subduing its heat, lessening its power, quenching its darts, and delivering us out of its fiery ordeal; restraining, overruling, blessing. "The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation." Fear not, then, O man of God, the quiver and the dart; both are under the control of Jesus, the once tempted One.

The Lord is with His people in adversity. Exempt from this, we should be equally exempted from a page in our history forming one of the most luminous in its record of Divine love and sympathy and support. The inheritance of the saints in this life is that of adversity- their inheritance in the life that is to come that of endless bliss.

The worldling has all his 'heaven' in this world. He has nothing to anticipate but a "fearful looking for of fiery indignation," which will devour the Lord's adversaries. My unconverted reader, your future is "written in mourning, lamentation, and woe." Your home will be hell; your 'god' will be Satan; your companions will be lost spirits; your "forever" an immortality of woe, of suffering, and of banishment from God, "where the worm never dies, and the flame is never quenched."

But affliction is the present lot of the saints. Beyond the present it never reaches. It distills no moisture, casts no shade, infuses no bitter in the future bliss of the glorified. It is a present thing, momentary, passing forever away. But there is this accompanying soothing, sanctifying truth- the Lord is with His people in adversity. And to be assured of this, to know it from personal and blest experience, is worth all the tribulation through which we have to pass in entering the kingdom of eternal glory.

If the presence of a friend in sorrow is so sweetening, if the silent sympathy in adversity of one we love is so soothing, oh, it is the ideal of bliss on earth, the consciousness that, when the cloud of woe is darkling over us, and the waves of tribulation are swelling around us, and the waters are coming in upon the soul, the Lord is with us, to comfort, support, and deliver us. "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon you." Sweet affliction! precious trial! that, like the surging billow, uplifts the soul, and casts it upon the Rock that is higher than us!

Oh, is there any circumstance, or stage, or place in which the Lord is not as truly with His saints as He was with Joseph? He is with us to counsel our perplexities, to guide our feet, to supply our need, to deliver us from the power of our enemies, to keep us from all evil, and to bring us home to glory. Oh, to be assured that the Lord is with us, we will not fear what man can do unto us. Precious presence of the Lord. It is a shield of adamant, a garden of delights, a tower of strength, a portion of heaven come down to earth. What is heaven- the heaven of heaven? Is it not the full, the perfect, the unclouded presence of the Lord? And what is the Lord's visible presence with us here, but the pledge, the foretaste of heaven- what but heaven and earth kissing each other? It is thus the man of God becomes familiar with the country to which he is journeying, with the home in which he will forever dwell, with the companions with whom he will eternally associate, and with the glorious Lord, whose presence will constitute his highest heaven!

Oh, what a profound significance of meaning is in these words, "The Lord was with Joseph." To have Jehovah with us is to be encircled by every divine perfection, to be encompassed by a wall of fire which no foe can penetrate, to dwell in the munition of rocks, our bread and our water sure, to

have ever at our side a flowing spring in drought, the shadow of a great rock in the heat, a table in the wilderness, the divine cloud and fire safely conducting our journey homeward.

"Such honor have all the saints." Child of God! though less signally and manifestly, yet not less really or blessedly, is God with you in all your history. Let faith deal with this truth in all its battles and its trials. You may seem and feel at times alone. The sun may withdraw itself, and the stars of night may be draped in cloud, and dark, and dreary, and lonesome may be your way; nevertheless, let faith, whose most brilliant achievements are when it is the most opposed to sense, grapple with this truth. "I am kept, guided, watched over, encircled by the Unseen God. The Lord is with me, and I will endure as seeing Him who is invisible."

We now turn again to Joseph. We marvel not that, after this declaration of the Divine presence encompassing him, it should be added, "whatever he did, the Lord made it to prosper." And it was truly and literally so: everything he touched seemed transmuted into gold; everything he undertook was conducted to a successful issue; all his thoughts and enterprises were crowned with the Divine favor and blessing.

"Whatever he did, the Lord made it to prosper." We learn from this, the only source of true prosperity- the Lord's blessing. Promotion comes not from the east nor from the west; in vain we rise up early, sit up late, and eat the bread of carefulness; futile and fruitless will be all our schemes, and plans, and toil, if God does not make it to prosper. He alone can lift up our ways when they are depressed, make straight our path when encompassed with difficulties, pluck our feet from the net which entangles them, and conduct to a successful and honorable issue all your thoughts, enterprises, and labors.

Take the prosperity of Joseph as a type and pledge of your own. Acknowledge the Lord in all your ways as He did; let God's fear rule you as it ruled him; be afraid only of sin, and shrink only from compromising Christ's crown, and dishonoring Christ's name; and the Lord will be with you, and that which you do, He will make it to prosper. He will exalt you to wealth, distinction, and usefulness in this life; and in the life to come, to honor, immortality, and glory!

"Father! for pleasant paths on earth

My spirit yearneth not;

For loving kindred's clasping hands,

And home, I ask You not.

I would forego all anxious thought,

And cast on You my care,

Content to see Your love in all

To trace You everywhere."

"Teach me to listen for Your voice,

When the world's storm howls loud;

Help me to look for light from You
Beneath the darkest cloud.
To feel Your hand the tempest rules,
That You can hear and save,
That You have set a bound unto
The wildest, stormiest wave."
"The tempest yet was never so loud
To drown the soul's faint cry;
Nor cloud so dark to hide Your child
From Your all-seeing eye.
Lighten mine eyes, that I may read
Each page of life to me
And from each passing hour receive
A message, Lord, from Thee."
"Lead me to seek, with patient prayer,
Your counsel for my stay,
And look to You to guide my steps
In Your appointed way.
With glad and grateful heart accept
The work Your wisdom wills,
And bless the hand that but in love
The cup of sorrow fills."
"Seeking what path You'd have for me
What heart to cheer or bless,
Even as I would ask of Thee
For comfort in distress;
Content to share in other's joy;
And if this may not be,
Still happy that my chequered lot

Was chosen, Lord, by Thee." -Anna Shipton

Integrity and Uprightness

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"Let integrity and uprightness preserve me; for I wait on You." Psalms 25:21.

"May integrity and uprightness protect me, because my hope is in you." Psalms 25:21

A stronger characteristic of a true man of God than that which this prayer of David involves can scarcely exist. Its absence in many who bear this honored name must forcibly strike every careful observer of the age. It is impossible to survey attentively the world, without perceiving how much is transpiring that is utterly destitute of the holy, elevated principles prayed for and aimed after in this touching petition of the psalmist. Speak of the crime as mildly and as gently as you may- call it error of judgment, breach of confidence, the temptation of wealth, self-interest, an eye to the main chance, worldly policy- the Word of God classes all instances of defalcation, embezzlement, violated trust, dishonest dealing, simulation, and false returns under one denomination- THEFT; the reverse of that "integrity and uprightness " which should govern the minutest transaction, secular and religious, of the man of God.

The solemn law of the Decalogue, "you shall not steal" thunders its tones in the ears of every violator of the precept, whether he rob man or God. In endeavoring to meet this alarming and growing evil of the age- DISHONESTY- by an exposition and enforcement of the prayer of David, we shall, at the outset, take the higher ground of dishonesty towards God. To this the prophet Malachi refers in these remarkable words to the Jews, "You have robbed God." Startled by the charge, they inquire, "How have we robbed Him?" The prophet replies, "In tithes and offerings."

Let us proceed to examine and apply this subject, both in its divine and human relationships. Wherein do we rob God? God has a claim upon our entire being: "All souls are mine." The surrender of affection to Him as the first and greatest Being in the universe, as our Creator, Benefactor, and Preserver, must be paramount and supreme. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment." When this undivided and supreme love to God is withheld- when the creature's affection is alienated from Him, and surrendered to another and an inferior being- the creature loved, rather than the Creator- there is a robbing of God. My reader, do you so love God? Are you dealing honestly with Him in your affections? Is God the supreme Sovereign of your heart? No love less than this will He accept. We repeat, when we give our affections to the world, to the creature, to self, positively and supremely- stopping short of entire self-consecration, we withhold from God His just due, and are chargeable before Him with the crime of spiritual robbery.

Again, God has the prior claim to our talents; and when the varied faculties and powers with which He has endowed us, and which were furnished for His glory, are not renewed by His Spirit, and devoted to His service, but are employed in the promotion of our self-interest; sensual gratification, perchance, as weapons of direct hostility to His being, His government, and His truth, we stand in His presence chargeable with the crime of robbing God. Oh, how great the responsibility, how

solemn the account, how tremendous the doom of those whose intellectual powers mold the thoughts and influence the passions of others, but mold and influence them only for evil.

If the productions of which we are the authors- and which, while we live, exerted a baneful influence upon the popular mind, and, when we are dead, survive to perpetuate that influence yet more extended and disastrous in generations to come- are such as to pervert the great end of their creation, then, as rational and intellectual beings, we dishonor God by withholding from Him the glory of our consecrated talents and endowments. While to be a benefactor of mind is the highest privilege God can confer, to be a perverter and destroyer of mind is the deepest of crimes, and involves the direst of punishments. Let Christians pray for those who mold the thoughts and opinions of the popular mind, that the power they exert may be healthful, ennobling, and saving.

And are there not many who rob God by withholding from Him the consecration of their temporal substance? There will never be a deep conviction of the criminality of this sin until men everywhere learn that they are not proprietors, but stewards only of what they possess. "You are not your own" is a precept equally applicable to property as to person. Our Lord's parable of the talents was designed, among other lessons, to teach this, its chief and practical one, that, whether it be the one talent or the ten, the Divine Lord is the Giver of both, and holds each individual responsible, as a steward, for the manner in which he has disposed of his talents.

The possession of property involves a fearful responsibility- a responsibility which must be measured by the amount of wealth possessed. It may, perhaps, be difficult accurately to determine, from the teaching of the New Testament scriptures, the exact amount of income each individual should devote to Christian and benevolent purposes; nor is this absolutely necessary. The Christ-loving disciple will be a law to himself in this matter. He will not grudgingly and carefully graduate his benevolence by any financial law, however clearly defined, which he may find in the Scriptures; he will rather consecrate his entire wealth, be it much or little, as not his own but the Lord's; and while he "honors the Lord with the first fruit of all his increase," he will not limit his charity to this, but will consider it his privilege, as an honest and prudential course would dictate, to give the utmost elasticity to a law which claims all we are, and all we have, for Christ. Oh, let us be careful that we do not rob God by withholding from Him our worldly substance.

Again, we may rob God of His own by a misuse of time. Time is a solemn and priceless gift, and involves a responsibility and an account of a most tremendous character. It is the preface to eternity- brief, it is true, yet, as the preface indicates the character of the volume, so the present is the foreshadowing in each one's history of the future. Time is a feather falling from the pinion of eternity, as it sweeps on in its boundless, endless course, hurrying us with rapid flight to that eternity from where it came. What sin, what madness, then, to abuse a privilege so solemn- to misuse a blessing so precious. To employ it in vain pleasures and frivolous pursuits- to use it in senseless puerilities, sinful engagements- to devote it too absorbingly even to literary and elegant pursuits- the studies of the antiquarian, the researches of the historian, the fascination of art, to discoveries of science- may verge upon the crime of robbing God of one of His most costly loans.

All these absorbing engagements are limited to the present, and have no essential relation to the soul's certain and solemn future. Oh, you killers of time! How will the ghost of your murdered hours haunt and upbraid you through the interminable centuries of eternity! Oh, what would you not then give for one hour of that precious period of your existence which now you waste and fritter and

destroy in vain, useless, and sinful trifles, chimeras, and shadows. Remember, you rob God when your TIME is not consecrated to His glory. Ponder well the inspired precept, "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." Consider, the apostolic exhortation "Brethren, the time is short."

God is robbed by us when we attempt to supplant Him in the work and in the glory of our salvation. The salvation of man is pre-eminently the work of God. "Salvation is of God"- devised, achieved, and bestowed by Him. Redemption is a divine act, undertaken and accomplished by Incarnate Deity. Had not Christ our Savior been essentially and absolutely God, He could not have offered an atonement to the moral government of Jehovah, blending the honor and glory of God with the full, free salvation of the guiltiest of the human race.

Essentially connected with man's salvation is God's glory. To no work was the Divine honor solemnly committed, in no enterprise was it so fully embarked as in saving lost man. God, therefore, is jealous of His glory in man's salvation, not a particle of which will He gave to another. If, then, we attempt to uprear the Babel of our own righteousness in unbelief and scorn, rejecting the righteousness of Christ; if we seek the way of life other than that which God has opened to us through the crucified Savior, thus climbing up some other way into heaven, we then are found robbers of God! We rob Him of the glory which belongs alone to Him; we rob Him of the work which He only can achieve; we rob Him of the honor which only is His most righteous due; and we rob our own souls of their eternal glory.

And then there are others who commit robbery by stealing their religion: We have spoken, in a preceding chapter, of a borrowed religion, we refer now to a stolen one. God seems to refer to this species of religious theft in these remarkable words, addressed to the prophets of old, "Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, says the Lord, who STEAL my words every one from his neighbor," (Jer. xxiii. 30.) How easily, and yet how unsuspectingly may we be guilty of this sin. You have, perchance, a godly parent, a pious husband, wife, or child, and, imperceptibly to yourself, you become familiar with their Christian vocabulary, learn their tones, and acquire the habit of speaking their words. You become, in some measure, by association, molded into their habits, assimilated to their religious usages, and thus are beguiled into a religious phraseology and demeanor not your own,

learned, if not secretively obtained, from those with whom we associate. In all this you have never felt yourself a lost sinner, guilty, condemned, and ready to perish. You have learned nothing of the plague of your own heart, nothing of the need, the worth, and the preciousness of the Savior; you are traveling to death and eternity in a false disguise, having a name to live while yet you are dead. "Do not be deceived, for God is not mocked."

And may not even the Lord's own people verge closely upon this sin of robbing God? If there is any withholding from God His just return of praise, thanksgiving, and devotion; if, beguiled by self-seeking, self-pleasing, self-trust, we give Him not all the honor and glory which is His most righteous due; if we retain the property, the talents, the service, which belong not to ourselves but to Christ- then are we guilty of withholding from God a part of His purchased possession. And in what other light must we view the unsteady, even unholy walk of any child of God, but this?

In every act of unbelief, in every wilful departure, in every instance of self-pleasing, we take from the Lord the glory belonging to His great and holy name. If we refuse to bring into His house our

tithes and offerings of faith, and love, and prayer, and service- if we only make Him to serve with our sins, departures, and backslidings- then may our God justly and indignantly say to us, "YOU HAVE ROBBED ME." Dear Lord! deliver us from this sin!

We now turn to the particular sin which David deprecates, and against which he prays: "Let integrity and uprightness preserve me." It is a many-headed monster sin. It exhibits itself unmistakably in the crime of the public defaulter- in the fraudulent trustee- in the dishonest seller- in the shrewd purchaser- in the artful borrower- in the usurious lender- in the deceptive quality of the manufacturer- in the false measurement and weight of the retailer. But why enumerate?

It is a sin of so Protean a form, that it often rears its hideous head where the most skillful eye would least expect to behold it. So subtle and insinuating, so disguised and plausible a sin is it, that the best of men need the most wakeful vigilance and prayer lest they become ensnared into its commission! "Let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall." Let all who are entrusted with public or individual confidence, to whose hands the funds of charity, or the property of the widow and the orphan, are confided, be doubly watchful against the sinful promptings of their own hearts, the snares of irresponsible power and of possessed wealth.

"Better is a little with righteousness, than great revenues without right." Of such a one- the defaulter, the defrauder, the man of ill-gotten wealth- inspiration says "He has swallowed down riches, and he shall vomit them up again God shall cast them out of his belly." Around the widow and the orphan God has thrown an especial shield. Woe to those who oppress the one or defraud the other! "A Father of the fatherless, and a Judge of the widow, is God in His holy habitation."

In conclusion- study the prayer of the true man of God, anxious to keep his garments unsullied amid a thousand snares, "Let integrity and uprightness preserve me." Let all beware of the sin of covetousness- it has drowned many souls in perdition. Whether it be Achan's wedge of gold, Naboth's vineyard, Ananias and Sapphira's withheld possession, the sin is essentially the same- the sin of COVETOUSNESS- which ranks in the catalogue with sin's darkest crimes.

If that giant in grace, David, the king of Israel; needed to pray for integrity and uprightness in all his transactions, how much deeper is our need! He prayed like a man of God, conscious of his weakness, who trembled lest he should fall, and who felt that nothing short of a Divine hand could hold him up. "Covetousness and truce-breaking "- one of the signs of the last days- is a fretting sore, not only in the body politic, but in the professing Church of God.

The sin of dishonesty derives not its character, its turpitude, or measurement from the object defrauded, or the amount of the fraud- the principle is the same whether the party robbed be a parent or a bank, the amount of the fraud large or small. Human jurisprudence may, and perhaps justly, allow of shades of guilt, and award degrees of punishment in acts of peculation, deception, and fraud; but in the sight of God every violation of His commandment of the Decalogue, "You shall not steal," involves a guilt and a punishment; if penitence is not felt, and forgiveness is not awarded, alike the same.

But there is forgiveness for the penitent. The only instance recorded in Scripture of forgiveness at the last and latest hour is that of a penitent thief. See him contrite, confessing, praying See him turn his dying eye to the crucified Savior! Listen to his acknowledgment and his petition. Behold him washing in the Fountain that flowed warm and cleansing at his side. Reader! have you been

guilty of a like crime? Has the Holy Spirit wrought in you contrition and self-abasement, ingenuous confession and desire of restitution? Behold the Lamb of God! Bathe in the purple stream; and thus washed, thus cleansed, thus forgiven, go, and sin no more!

Lord! "give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me, lest I be full, and deny You, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal; and take the name of my God in vain."

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